

GOOD INTENTIONS

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George A. Birmingham

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SPANISH GOLD

GOOD INTENTIONS

by

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM



METHUEN & CO. LTD., LONDON

36 Essex Street, Strand, W.C.2

To
ALTHEA
MY PROP AND STAY IN THE EVIL DAYS
WE HAVE PASSED THROUGH TOGETHER

First published in 1945



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED
IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH
THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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PART I

LONDON

IN THE autumn of 1940 it was still possible to dine well in the Minerva Club, and a sagacious member could choose a wine to his taste from a long list. He could, if he felt doubtful, have the advice of Parker, the wine waiter, a man whose knowledge of vineyards and vintages was unsurpassed even in London.

Sir Aylmer Elton made full use of these advantages when he entertained Mr. Bledsom Van Rennan. It was a farewell dinner, and on such occasions it is right that a guest should be treated as well as possible. Next day Van Rennan was to face the Atlantic crossing on his way back to his home in New York. He was a man of some importance in his own country, rich even by American standards, and of recognized financial ability. He was President of the Eastern Lands Security Investment Company, Inc. It was generally understood that it was entirely owing to his energy and ability that the Company, originally looked on doubtfully, was now one of the great commercial concerns, whose shares were widely dealt in, not only in Wall Street, but on the London Stock Exchange. He was therefore a man whom it was desirable to conciliate when he paid a visit to England.

Nominally this visit was an entirely business mission, concerned with the affairs of his company. But it was generally understood that Mr. Van Rennan was a man whose political activities were of importance in America and of some interest in England. No one knew whether it was through the Eastern Lands Security Investment Company or not; but he was somehow mixed up with ships, and ships were of the utmost importance to England.

It fell to the lot of Sir Aylmer Elton to look after the entertainment of this important guest. A better man

could hardly have been chosen. A hint from the Minister of Co-Ordination, who had himself received a hint from the Foreign Office, made the position clear to a man of Sir Aylmer's intelligence. There were to be no official receptions, no well advertised public dinners with speeches reported in the papers next day. Mr. Van Rennan was not a delegate sent to England by the President of the United States. He was, indeed, a Republican. Most men in Big Business are Republican and dislike Mr. Roosevelt. But Mr. Van Rennan sat loose from his party. He was no isolationist, but had repeatedly declared his warm sympathy with England. It was obviously important to encourage such a man, and this could best be done by making his stay in England as pleasant as possible.

Sir Aylmer had all the qualifications necessary for such a job. As a permanent civil servant of high standing, he had all the suavity of manner, the complete freedom from prejudice, traditional in that service. There was no trace of egotism in his character and he had developed the virtue of tact in the highest degree. He had guided the erratic steps of a whole series of ministers in various departments, preventing them from doing foolish things, generally—and this is the highest wisdom—preventing them from doing anything at all, and this without allowing them to discover that they were helpless figureheads.

As an Irishman, a member of the dispossessed aristocracy of his country, he had that charm of manner which was always characteristic of his class, and is now almost all that is left them of their former greatness. His social position was all that could be desired. He mixed freely with what are known as the 'best people'. He had a comfortable income, and, as a widower, no family connexions which might have hampered him. There was indeed one small daughter, but she did not matter. A Lady Elton might have been a difficulty. A detached Sir Aylmer was a much easier man to entertain, and it is not necessary to consider a nine-year-old daughter

when issuing invitations to dinner or a week-end party. It was easy to introduce Mr. Van Rennan to charming ladies, not noticeably political and quite unofficial, the pleasantest people in English society. The charming ladies and their husbands were quite ready to accept any friend of Sir Aylmer's, and very speedily began to like Mr. Van Rennan for his own sake.

He had all the qualities which make the American gentleman welcome everywhere. Sir Aylmer found his task much more agreeable than he had expected, and the two men became warm friends. Hence this carefully planned dinner at the Minerva Club on the last evening of Van Rennan's stay in England.

Early in the course of their friendship Van Rennan had made a generous offer. The bombing of London had begun and was rising in intensity. Children of all classes were being evacuated, some to parts of England regarded as safe, some to distant lands, Canada, and even the United States. Van Rennan suggested that he should take the nine-year-old Elsie, Sir Aylmer's daughter, back to America, and there care for her till London was delivered from peril and became a safe home for a child.

'My wife,' he said, 'will be just tickled to death to have her.'

Sir Aylmer had no doubt about that. He had never met Mrs. Van Rennan, but it seemed to him that any woman, especially one with no children of her own, would naturally be 'just tickled to death' to adopt, even temporarily, a child like his Elsie. And if Mrs. Van Rennan was anything like her husband she would be not only a kindly but an intelligent woman, well fitted to take charge of a growing child.

'London,' said Van Rennan, 'is no place for a child at present. Elsie would be much better out of it.'

There was no denying this; but Sir Aylmer was most unwilling to part with his daughter, all that was left to him of a very happy married life.

Van Rennan repeated his invitation many times.

Indeed he gave it, in one form or another, whenever he found a chance of repeating his warning of danger. The Germans, having been heavily defeated in daylight air battles, had begun their attempt to destroy London by night. Against these attacks there was, at first, no obvious way of defence. Children, especially greatly loved children, certainly ought to be in places of safety, if such places could be found for them.

'You've got to stay here,' said Van Rennan, and this too he repeated more than once, 'but there's no call to have your little girl scared to death. Might kind of warp her nature for life.'

He did not say, though he might have said, that something worse than being scared might happen to a child in London. But Sir Aylmer was perfectly well aware of that possibility. Bombs kill as well as frighten. Yet he hesitated. It is not an easy thing to part with a small daughter for—Sir Aylmer was too wise and knew too much to be an optimist—the parting, if there was to be a parting, would be not for weeks or months, but for years.

Dinner was over. The excellent dinner with the well-chosen wines had been enjoyed by Van Rennan. The two men sat in the smoking-room of the Minerva. Cigars were still obtainable in London. They were obtained. Coffee was brought by a liveried man of perfect manners, for London clubs were not yet reduced to the services of girls imported from the neutral parts of Ireland. With the coffee came properly shaped and well-filled glasses of Armanac. Van Rennan, very much at his ease, went back to the subject of Elsie and his offer of a home for her in New York.

'Just you go home right now,' he said, 'soon as ever you've finished your cigar. Roll up her toothbrush in her pyjamas or whatever she wears in bed and hand her over to me to-morrow. Never mind about packing up frocks and stockings. Mrs. Van Rennan will enjoy running round to see what the Fifth Avenue stores can

do in the way of fitting out a little girl. It will be a real treat for her. There are times when she finds it hard to get rid of the dollars.'

Sir Aylmer's highly trained civil service mind was profoundly shocked at the idea of such abrupt proceedings. It is not in this way that things are done in Whitehall offices. An assembly of bishops, no less a body than the Pan-Anglican Conference, once passed a resolution 'deprecating precipitancy of action'. Our civil servants have recognized the wisdom of the episcopate. Nothing is more abhorrent to them than precipitancy of action. Sir Aylmer felt strongly the need for leisurely proceeding in the matter of his daughter's evacuation, if indeed she was to be evacuated at all. To start her off next day on a journey across the Atlantic was contrary to all the traditions of his service. It was worse than that. It was undignified. Worse still, it was, perhaps not actually wicked, but very nearly.

'But,' he said, 'a passport must be obtained and an exit permit, and—and——' He was not quite sure at the moment what else would be required, but he felt quite certain that there were several other things all absolutely necessary and not to be obtained hurriedly.

'And it all takes time', he said. 'These things can't be done in a minute.'

'Don't you tell me,' said Van Rennan, 'that a man in your position can't act the Almighty God with these dithering regulations. I've had my leg pulled good and often since I came to England and I don't resent it. But that's too much of a stretch. Why in my country the mayor of a low down middle west town would know how to deal with rules and regulations if they got round to obstructing him in a matter of importance. You may be a bit constipated over here, especially in the matter of regulations. But don't you tell me that a man in your position can't make these little graven images come alive if he choses.'

Sir Aylmer was not at all sure that he, though a power-

ful man in the Ministry of Co-Ordination, could galvanize the gentlemen in charge of our wartime regulations into anything so unseemly as speed. He shook his head sadly, but in his eyes was a twinkle of suppressed merriment. He was a civil servant of long standing and was deeply steeped in venerable tradition. But he was, or his parents had been, Irish. Far down in him there survived one national characteristic. He did enjoy the thought of hustling people who make laws and regulations. He could not, holding the position he did, indulge in this pleasure, but he admired, from a safe distance, anyone who did.

'And anyway,' said Van Rennan, 'I have a pretty good dollar credit at the back of my name. I reckon money talks here same as anywhere else.'

'For God's sake,' said Sir Aylmer, 'don't go round trying to bribe men in our Government Offices.'

The Irish in him sank out of sight. The English trained civil servant came to the surface. He was shocked at the impious suggestion. The servants of the state in this country really are incorruptible. They have their faults—excess of caution, for instance—a fear of responsibility, but they do not accept bribes. This is laudable, but in some ways inconvenient. A thing would be done much more quickly if there were the prospect of a hundred pounds into the doer's pocket as a reward for promptness. There is something to be said for a thoroughly corrupt bureaucracy. It does get things done if generously bribed.

'When I said "talks",' said Van Rennan, 'I maybe used too strong a word. I ought to have said whispers. It sure does that, especially in the dark. Your Treasury does want dollars, and wants them pretty bad. If it doesn't, why does it sell every drop of decent whiskey to us? And I have the dollars, plenty of them, more than I have any use for.'

'The Treasury!' Sir Aylmer gasped, really gasped with horror. 'Why——'

He would have said more, much more, but no one will ever know what words he would have used, what words he could have found to express his amazement and indignation. His speech was interrupted. Indeed he was almost entirely deprived of speech for some minutes. A siren had sounded ten minutes earlier. Neither of the two men was disturbed by it. Siren wails were common enough in London at that time. But this siren had not sounded without purpose. An aeroplane, certainly German, was drumming overhead. While Sir Aylmer spoke there was a terrifying shriek high up in the sky. It grew louder, gathered strength in a blood curdling crescendo. There was a crash. Shattered glass rattled against the closed shutters of the room. A chandelier swung like a pendulum from its fastening in the ceiling. Sir Aylmer's coffee-cup fell to the floor. Half Van Rennan's Armanac spilled in a pool on the table. An acrid, dusty smoke penetrated into the room in spite of the shutters, through the quivering curtains.

'What they call a near miss,' said Van Rennan. 'Must have got the house across the street. Don't like them so close. Not at all. No use setting up to be brave. There's none of that swagger about me. I'm an arrant coward at moments like this.'

Sir Aylmer made no boast of courage either. No more than most men was he free from fear. He was indeed ready enough to accept risks which he could not escape. The thought of leaving London did not enter his mind. As the real head of a great Ministry he could not, just could not, run away. He knew that London was at that time almost defenceless. He knew that the bombing was likely to go on and get worse for some months to come. He could and would face that. But while the club shook and the fragments of his coffee-cup lay among the broken glass on the floor, he thought of his daughter Elsie. He had a vision of her crying with terror in her little bed, with her Nannie, equally frightened, in hysterics beside her. In fact nothing of the sort was happening in his

house in Kensington. Elsie, wakened by the bomb, had gone quickly to sleep again. The Nannie, a woman without nerves as all good nannies must be, had gone on with her knitting, not even dropping a stitch. But this Sir Aylmer did not know, and would hardly have believed if he had been told. The thought of Elsie in peril—that was real enough—frightened him into a sudden panic.

‘You’d better take Elsie,’ he said to Van Rennan. ‘Take her to-morrow.’

Then, when another bomb fell, though not so close, he added: ‘I wish to God you could take her to-night.’

PART II

MID-ATLANTIC

I

THE *UKRANIA* was never a fast ship even in her early days. Those who crossed the Atlantic in her were people who were in no hurry to get to their destinations, who preferred a cheap fare to the saving of a day or two, who found more satisfaction in solid comfort on the voyage than in the pleasure of boasting afterwards that they had travelled in a record-breaking ocean greyhound.

In war-time the *Ukrania* was slower still, being forced to sail in a convoy and accommodate her pace to that of some poorly engined tramp which sailed along with her. The standard of comfort deteriorated, too. The ship was crowded. In the opinion of her officers, and still more emphatically of her cabin staff, she was grossly overcrowded. Yet even on the *Ukrania* in these conditions Mr. Van Rennan's belief in the persuasiveness of money's power of talking proved sound. Whether his dollars, directly or indirectly used, had anything to do with the speeding up of the formalities of Elsie's departure is doubtful. That miracle was accomplished through Sir Aylmer's influence and his sudden abandonment, for this particular occasion only, of the dignified procedure of the civil service. No one had ever before seen a highly placed civil servant in a hurry, or remembered such a man doing anything else but pass over the job on hand to a similarly placed official in another ministry. Sir Aylmer, remembering the bombs of the night before, made his demands with a passion which startled and bewildered the passport people, the exit permitters, the supervisors of evacuation and all the other officials concerned. Stampeded as they never in their lives had been stampeded before, they affixed their signatures and applied rubber

stamps to documents without pausing to think that in trampling on their own sacred regulations they were doing very wrong, committing crimes which amounted to *lèse-majesté* mixed with blasphemy.

Afterwards they did pause, think and wonder at what they had done. No satisfactory explanation of their conduct suggested itself until someone remembered that Sir Aylmer had been born in County Galway.

'That damned Irishman,' this man said, 'rushed us. Just like him.'

It was not in the least like the Sir Aylmer whom everyone had known and respected for years. But, once pointed out, his Irish origin did seem to account for the frenzy with which he had disorganized official life. He was never entirely forgiven. For years afterwards resentment smouldered. When Sir Aylmer's name was mentioned those who had suffered shrugged their shoulders.

'Irish, of course,' they said. 'You never can tell where these fellows will break out and do something outrageous.'

It was this outbreak of Irishness, and not Van Rennan's willingness to bribe, which accounted for the amazing, almost incredible fact that Elsie Elton went on board the *Ukrania* twenty-four hours after her journey was decided on. If this explanation is the true one, then Hitler's bomb, the one which fell near the Minerva Club, did more than smash several important buildings. It did what even an earthquake could hardly have been expected to accomplish. By thoroughly rousing the Irishman in Sir Aylmer it gave vitality to a whole body of men accustomed to a moribund existence.

Sir Aylmer's influence, if indeed it existed to anything like the extent supposed, ceased at the gangway of the *Ukrania*. It was at that point that Van Rennan's money began to talk, loudly and effectively. Elsie was placed in charge of a stewardess, a woman who promised, in return for a heavy tip, to look after the child. In spite

of the fact that the woman had far too much to do, she kept her promise, encouraged by what lawyers call refreshers, administered at short intervals during the voyage. Not even her own devoted Nannie at home could have taken more pains to secure the comfort and general well being of Elsie.

Mr. Van Rennan's expenditure did not stop there. He thought of Elsie first, but he took thought for himself too. There were stewards—dining-room stewards, cabin stewards, deck stewards, smoking-room stewards—who came to feel that their first duty was to Van Rennan, and that other passengers could wait for what they wanted, or do without it. So money talks. Is it any wonder that in planning the new world which is to be, those who are not well off are hoping to be rich, or if this proves impossible, at least to organize society so that there should be no Van Rennans in it and that everyone should be uncomfortably poor together? There was an Irish labourer, speaking to his wealthy employer, who explained the revolution then taking place in his country by saying: 'It's time now that us should be yous, and yous should be us.' That man was a philosopher who understood all revolutions. It may not indeed be possible that the 'us' should become as rich as the 'yous'—but it can always be arranged that the 'yous' should be reduced to the level of the 'us'.

But Van Rennan, besides being rich and knowing how to spend his money, was in other ways, too, a fortunate man. On the second day of the voyage he discovered three men who were willing to play bridge all day, from eleven a.m., and as much of the night as was available before the bar closed. Of these, two could play the game well, almost as well as Van Rennan himself, though they lacked something of his dash and willingness to take risks. The fourth man, a Colonel Wallaby, played a game suitable only to the family circle with stakes fixed at a penny a hundred. In his home it was not unusual for his wife to inquire half-way through a game whether diamonds

or spades were trumps, and for one of his daughters to mention, in the middle of a no-trump hand, that a friend whom she met in the bus had advised her where to buy stockings.

If any one else could have been found to take Colonel Wallaby's place he would have been quietly dropped. But no one else on the ship was willing to play bridge at all. Unfortunately, inability to play was not Colonel Wallaby's only fault. He believed that he could play, and often lectured his partner on what he regarded as mistaken calls. In this he was perhaps justified by the fact that he was a man who occupied a high position at home and had been sent to America on an important mission. Such men are surely right in thinking they can discuss the shortcomings of others. The bad play and the bad manners irritated Van Rennan a good deal.

But things were not so bad for him as they might have been. He enjoyed, when cut with Wallaby, running big risks to take his partner out of a declared suit, so reducing him to the position of dummy where he could do no harm in the actual play. Fortunately, again, Elsie was a little girl who made few demands on his time and gave him little or no trouble. She liked a walk on deck and a game of quoits if the weather was moderate. She liked to be allowed to chatter at meals, and easily came to regard 'Uncle Bled'—she had promoted him to this degree of kinship—as an intelligent and sympathetic listener. Otherwise she was quite content to sit in a corner of the smoking-room with a book while Van Rennan played bridge.

The stewardess, herself the mother of three sons, had some knowledge of the kind of stories which interest little boys. She believed that the literary taste of girls is much the same as that of boys, and that all children of the age of nine or thereabouts like to read the same books, if they like to read any books at all. The *Ukrania* had an unusually good ship's library. Being a very slow and not at all a fashionable ship, it was necessary

to provide plenty of books for passengers, who were going to spend a long time on their way and were likely to belong for the most part to the classes who read books. For faster ships with wealthier passengers books are not necessary, and if provided at all the choice may safely be left to the managers of circulating libraries at home who naturally are inclined to dump on board books which their ordinary customers refuse to read.

There was in the *Ukrania's* library a special section for children's books. The stewardess, relying on her experience as a mother, picked out what she knew her boys liked to read. She was quite right. Elsie preferred adventure stories to any others. She read ship-wreck and desert island stories with particular delight.

The fifth day of the voyage was wet, cold and thoroughly miserable. Deck games were impossible, for the ship was pitching heavily into a head sea. A walk on deck was so unpleasant that passengers, even those most regular in pacing there and back, turned a deaf ear to the call of duty and made shift to do without their daily exercise. In the smoking-room, comfortably warm and well lighted, Van Rennan and his three friends sat at their bridge, sufficiently content. Curled up in the corner of a broad sofa Elsie sat with her book. It was a very good book, for it was about a ship-wreck, and nothing could be more interesting than that to a child who was herself at sea, on a tossing ship in mid-Atlantic.

The men in the ship of the story were not so well off as Elsie in the *Ukrania*. They were on a sailing ship, for the story dated back to the days when steamers were rare. A fierce storm had struck them, a very fierce storm which swept away their masts. Their position was wellnigh desperate, for their boats had been broken by the waves and they were driven to that last expedient of wrecked mariners, the making of a raft. Among those on board was the captain's little daughter. Whether her eyes, like those of the little maiden on the ill-fated *Hesperus*, were blue 'as the fairy flax' the book did not

say. Nor did Elsie care. She was thrilled, but the features of the heroine—for this little girl turned out to be a heroine—did not interest Elsie at all. What did thrill her was the intelligence of this captain's daughter, which was far superior to that of her father, who seemed to have been rather a stupid man. He had suffered his ship to be dismasted, had lost his boats and could think of nothing better to do than to make a raft, surely an almost hopeless means of safety unless rescue came from somewhere. And there was little chance of rescue unless a way could be found of communicating with some other ship or the shore. In those days there was no such thing as wireless telegraphy. The now familiar S.O.S. could not be flashed through the air. Had Marconi lived a little earlier that story would never have been written. Nor indeed would this one. Neither that captain's daughter nor Elsie Elton would have done what they both did. Then in the one case several lives would have been lost. In the other case Sir Aylmer and several other people would have been saved a good deal of trouble.

It was the captain's clever little daughter who suggested the writing of a letter in which the exact position of the wrecked ship, along with the name of the nearest desert island, should be stated. This letter was to be placed in a bottle, corked and securely sealed. Then it was to be flung into the sea, in the hope that it would be picked up by some other ship, or washed ashore in some inhabited country. A rescue party would then be organized and every one, who had not died of hunger on the raft, would be saved. The plan seemed a good one to the captain's daughter, and apparently to every one else on board the ship, for the thing was done. It was indeed, as it turned out in the story, a very good plan indeed. The bottle was picked up by a ship which went straight to the desert island named in the letter and arrived in time to pick up the surviving castaways, who had just eaten the last cocoa-nut to be found on the island. The captain's little

daughter was among those saved. The grateful crew had given her the milk from the cocoa-nuts they found, thus preserving her alive and in good health until the rescue ship came.

The story interested Elsie greatly. She determined to send off a letter of her own in a corked and sealed bottle. Being a good and considerate child, she waited to approach Van Rennan on the subject until the rubber he was playing finished. She knew that it would be unkind and also very foolish to interrupt the play. Her chance came at last. The four men leaned back in their chairs, lit fresh cigars, and offered each other drinks. Elsie, carrying her book with her, slipped quietly across the room and stood beside Van Rennan's chair.

It was not altogether a fortunate moment. Van Rennan, with Colonel Wallaby as partner, had just lost the rubber owing chiefly to a blunder of Wallaby's in the last game. It was not the first, though it was the worst, he had made that evening. Van Rennan remonstrated mildly.

'If you had led me your small heart,' he said, 'instead of the queen of clubs, we should have got them two hundred down and prevented them making game and rubber.'

Wallaby did not like this. To him the queen of clubs seemed as good a card to lead as the small heart. Indeed to all outward appearance it was a much better card. And he resented being snubbed by a mere American. Wallaby knew himself to be a man of position and importance. He was Deputy Assistant Chief Consultant in the British Censorship Office and was crossing the Atlantic to get into personal touch with the American censors on a subject of importance. A man sent on such a mission ought not to be rebuked by a mere unofficial American citizen. He intended to make a sharp reply, upholding the dignity of the queen of clubs, but was interrupted by Elsie.

'Please Uncle Bled, may I do that?'

She laid her book on the table opened at the page where the captain's daughter's plan was described. Van Rennan read rapidly.

'Grand notion,' he said. 'It's O.K. by me.'

He was a kindly man and already sorry that he had spoken to Wallaby about the queen of clubs. By way of making some amends and restoring good feeling, he pushed the book across the table and told Wallaby to read it. Wallaby, interrupted before he could reply to Van Rennan, had to suppress his irritation. As so often happens with angry men who are prevented from saying what they want to, he nourished his grievance, indeed retained for years a dislike of Van Rennan. Colonel Wallaby was not a pleasant man.

'Oh thank you, Uncle Bled,' said Elsie.

'Only don't say the *Ukrania* has been wrecked,' said Van Rennan. 'Somebody might pick your bottle up and it wouldn't do to set the British fleet searching about for the desert island on which you were cast up. They'd be furious when they found you weren't. There'd be a terrific row.'

'Of course I wouldn't say that, Uncle Bled. That would be a lie, which is a very wrong thing. I never tell lies.'

'Well, if you do nothing but send your love to the finder,' said Van Rennan, 'there can't be any objection to your bottling up your letter.'

'Oh, thank you, Uncle Bled. But how am I to get a bottle?'

Van Rennan turned in his chair towards the smoking-room steward who was standing behind the bar.

'George!' he called.

He was a wise and experienced traveller and knew that mere tipping, however lavish, is not sufficient to secure willing and efficient service. He made it his habit to be on friendly terms with the staff of a hotel or a ship. He called every one by a Christian name, even a stewardess with whom he seldom came in contact. George, as it

happened, was not this man's name, but he had no objection to adopting it to please a man like Van Rennan.

'George,' he said, 'four large Scotch and sodas. And if that empties the bottle bring it here. This young lady wants an empty bottle, and you can get her anything else she asks for.'

'Certainly, sir,' said George. 'Whatever the young lady fancies.'

'Oh, thank you so much, Uncle Bled,' said Elsie, and to show she really meant this she put her arm round his neck and kissed him.

II

While Van Rennan was talking to the steward, Colonel Wallaby read the page of Elsie's book which described sending off the letter in the bottle. Among the cards which were scattered on the table the queen of clubs lay in front of him, face uppermost. It served as a reminder, though no reminder was needed, of Van Rennan's comment on his play. He felt that his opportunity had come—one of those opportunities, all too rare in life, where private interests can be combined with public duty.

'I'm afraid Van Rennan,' he said, 'that your niece cannot dispatch a letter in the way suggested in this book.'

He spoke with icy politeness.

'It just can't be done,' he added firmly, as a judge might pronounce sentence on a malefactor, knowing that there is no way of altering his decision.

'Why on earth not?' said Van Rennan. 'This ship must be full of empty bottles and all the corks can't have been thrown overboard. You still have a few corks, I suppose, George?'

'Plenty, sir,' said the steward. 'Hundreds, sir. Might be thousands.'

'Then why can't Elsie send off her letter?'

'For the simple reason,' said Colonel Wallaby, 'that

all letters must be passed through the Censor's Office and there examined. That is the law.'

'Good God,' said one of the victorious bridge-players who happened to be a naval captain. 'You don't mean to say— But you can't. You're trying to pull our legs.'

'I am simply stating what the law is,' said Wallaby.

'I'm all in favour of law,' said the remaining player. 'Make my living out of it, in fact.' He was an eminent barrister who had lately become a K.C. 'But I doubt whether your twopenny little regulations can properly be called laws.'

It was a neat point, but Wallaby was prepared to meet it.

'Law or regulation,' he said, 'it can be enforced, and the penalties for evasion or attempted evasion are severe. This letter cannot be despatched without being submitted to the censor.'

Elsie's eyes filled with tears of disappointment, and Elsie had appealing eyes even when not moist with tears. She looked round the four men at the table.

'Oh, Colonel Wallaby,' she said, 'don't, please don't, say I can't sent my letter!'

Wallaby wavered for an instant and might have given in if he had not again caught sight of the queen of clubs. The look of the card made him firm again. An insult to a man's bridge playing is a very grievous thing, not easy to forgive, quite impossible to forget.

'I'm sorry, Elsie,' he said. 'But I can't alter the regulations. Your letter cannot go.'

He spoke kindly, for he liked Elsie, though at that moment he greatly disliked Van Rennan. The child was a kind of pet on board the ship and every one treated her with indulgence. But— It may have been a sense of duty. It may have been resentment. One or other hardened him. Van Rennan had no right to complain about the queen of clubs. Wallaby still believed that she and not a small heart was the proper card to lead. And after all, regulations are sacred. He said so.

'I never heard such damned rot in my life,' said the naval man expressively. The navy is liable to these violent moods, perhaps because it is always handling things which go off with bangs. The lawyer was calmer and more self-restrained, but he had not given up the idea of making a good plea for Elsie's letter. A man cannot be a successful barrister without being able to argue a case, good or bad, and to raise unexpected points of law to the confusion of his opponents.

'I merely ask for information,' he said, 'but which censor ought to deal with Elsie's letter? Ours or the American? You will remember that we are now in mid-Atlantic, outside the territorial waters of either nation.'

It was a difficult question. A letter sent off in mid-Atlantic might be regarded as starting either from the west or from the east. In this case the destination of the letter was, of course, unknown, and this further complicated the matter. But Colonel Wallaby, a man of high intelligence and long experience in resolving difficulties of this kind, was quite ready with his answer.

'Both,' he said. 'Whatever the ultimate ruling about territorial waters may be, the letter must be censored both by the American and English authorities. No, Van Rennan, I'm sorry, but the thing simply can't be done. After all, there's a war on. We must remember that.'

A cynical aunt had once said of Elsie's eyes that they would get her into trouble in later life. They were creating trouble already, trouble for Colonel Wallaby. Van Rennan had shuffled the cards on the table and the queen of clubs was no longer a visible reminder of Wallaby's grudge against Van Rennan. He weakened again.

'Assuming an English place of origin of the letter,' said the K.C., who still saw points to be argued, 'the question of the destination of the letter arises. If it were to be delivered at an English address there would be no need of our censorship. If, on the other hand, it is to be delivered at an American address, then the United States censorship would not be needed.'

The barrister smiled triumphantly. He had made a good point.

Since the destination of a letter thrown into the sea in a bottle must be entirely uncertain, even Wallaby was at a loss for a direct answer. He fell back on a time-honoured device, one which has been found a very present help in trouble by officials in difficulty ever since the war began.

'If you will refer,' he said, 'to Form Q, Paragraph 21, Section 4, Sub-section 2D, and read it in conjunction with the ruling given in Paragraph 43, Section——'

'I'll see you in hell,' said the sailor, 'before I refer to any of your silly sections and sub-sections.'

'Sections,' said Wallaby, deeply offended, 'are never silly.'

'What I am going to do,' said the sailor, 'is to put the matter up to the captain of this ship, and if he says—as he certainly will—that Elsie may throw her bottle overboard, you'll find that as long as this ship is at sea his word goes and that your regulations and sections and sub-sections and paragraphs are just so much waste-paper.'

One tear had trickled down Elsie's cheek to the corner of her nose. A second tear, by way of her other cheek, had reached her mouth. She wiped them away with a corner of her frock. She had lost the handkerchief given her by the attentive stewardess. She felt greatly cheered. The naval officer seemed perfectly confident, as indeed naval officers usually are.

Colonel Wallaby was a little shaken. He had heard somewhere, at some time, that the powers of captains of ships at sea are unlimited. Besides, he did not want to disappoint Elsie if he could see a way out of the position in which he had placed himself. The child, after all, was quite innocent. She had not said a word about the queen of clubs and—witness her tears—seemed to regard regulations with proper respect.

'I submit,' said the K.C., 'that the word "letter" within

the meaning of the act cannot properly be applied to a missive enclosed in a bottle to which no postage stamp has been affixed and which bears no address. A letter, according to the decision of Mr. Justice Sparks, afterwards upheld by the court of appeal, is such a document as——

'See now,' said Van Rennan, 'we don't want to spend the rest of the voyage arguing about whether a letter is a letter or not. And we don't want to distract the Captain's attention when he's looking out for submarines. I suggest——' He had not only covered up the queen of clubs but every small heart exposed on the table. 'I suggest'—he turned to Wallaby with a friendly smile—'that you censor Elsie's letter yourself.'

'I!' said Wallaby. 'But——'

'After all,' said Van Rennan, 'you're one of the bosses of this censorship outfit. If you can't censor a letter, who can?'

This was a new idea to every one. To Wallaby it seemed a heaven-sent chance of escaping from his difficulty without loss of self-respect. The naval man, in spite of his confident words, was not sure how the captain might regard a rather frivolous interruption of his serious duties. The K.C. was getting tired of a case which held out no promise of fees.

'I'll censor your letter for you, Elsie, if you bring it to me when it is written,' said Colonel Wallaby, with the air of a man making a great concession.

'Oh, thanks most terribly,' said Elsie. 'I thought perhaps you would in the end because that is a kind thing to do, and I'm sure you're always trying to be kind. I am, always.'

'But,' said Wallaby, 'there must be no mention of chewing in the letter, or gum, particularly gum.'

'I won't even say glue,' said Elsie, 'if you'd rather I didn't. I don't think I shall want to, but one never knows what will come into a letter until one starts to write it. One often finds oneself saying things you'd

never expect beforehand. I once wrote to Aunt Jane '— she was the lady who had remarked on the dangerous beauty of Elsie's eyes—' telling her that Daddie had given me two budgerigars, quite forgetting that she was Vice-President of the Anti-Birds-In-Cages Society. That was what is called a *faux pas* when talking French, which I'm learning to. There was rather a row afterwards, though the worst thunderbolts fell on Daddie's head, not mine, he having given me the budgerigars. Still it taught me to be careful about *faux pas* in letters. So I won't mention glue if you'd rather I didn't.'

'Better keep clear of anything sticky,' said Van Rennan. 'If you find you must say something about making the raft, don't say you stuck it together with seccotine.'

'Of course not,' said Elsie. 'I know perfectly well that rafts are lashed together with marlin spikes. Glue would be no use. It would melt in the water and rafts are very wet always.'

'I shan't censor glue,' said Wallaby, 'but if you say gum I won't pass the letter. For security reasons and in the national interest I can't let gum pass.'

'In the name of Jupiter Omnipotens,' said the sailor, 'what has gum got to do with security?'

'That,' said Wallaby, with a creditable assumption of dignity, 'I cannot tell you without a gross breach of official confidence.'

The sailor did not believe this. Nor did the K.C. Yet Wallaby was speaking the simple truth. Without endangering the success of his mission to America he could not have explained his objection to the word gum.

Some months before a lady had written a letter to a friend in the United States. Her letter contained this sentence:

'It seems strange to us to see groups of American soldiers standing at the corners of Leicester Square chewing gum.'

The English censor had very properly excised the words 'American soldiers'. All mention of troop movements

are strictly forbidden, and though these soldiers were not actually moving they were chewing, and that might be regarded by military men as a form of movement, though there was not actual change of place by the chewer.

Unfortunately the letter was published in a small and unimportant place in the Middle West. There was a good deal of indignation aroused at what was regarded as a sneer at American soldiers. In spite of the censor's excision it was plain that the writer referred to Americans. No one else in the world chews gum either at the corner of Leicester Square or anywhere else.

A formal complaint was made to the English censor who ought to have deleted more than he did. It was generally recognized on both sides of the Atlantic that a crisis was imminent, and a break in the cordial relations between the two countries *might occur*. Hence Colonel Wallaby's mission to the United States. The hope was that he would be able to smooth over the difficulty if he were to 'contact his opposite number' in Washington.

Among the many benefits conferred on us by our ruling bureaucrats none is greater than the improvements they have effected in the English language. How could we get on if we were reduced to the miserable word 'meet', and like our poor ancestors did not know the verb 'contact'? And how else could we express the intricate relationship between official people if we had not been taught to speak of them as opposite numbers?

'Without a gross breach of confidence.'

Wallaby liked the words, and it gave him pleasure to repeat them. Pomposity must be forgiven to men engaged in negotiation on the outcome of which the fate of nations may depend. Pomposity is one of the perquisites of their position.

Here George, the steward, who had listened to all that was said, broke in to the conversation.

'Beg pardon, sir,' he said, 'but if it's a question of smuggling Miss Elsie's letter ashore and posting it in New York, I can manage that all right.'

He had only imperfectly understood what was said, for he had not seen the story book, but he had gathered that there was some difficulty about a letter which a censor might object to.

'It's a thing that's often done, sir, as no doubt you know,' said George.

He chanced to look at Colonel Wallaby as he spoke and noticed a startled and very unpleasant expression on his face.

'Not that I care to be mixed up in anything of the sort,' he said. 'It's what I've never done and wouldn't do. Dangerous game that is, and often there's very little to be got out of it. But in the case of this young lady I'd be willing to take the risk.'

George, like every one else in the ship, was fond of Elsie.

'Do you mean to say,' said Colonel Wallaby, 'that there's a traffic, a totally illegal traffic, in letters across the Atlantic?'

'And stockings, sir. Silk stockings. Ladies ought to have stockings. I may be old fashioned in my ideas, but I don't like them going about without stockings, not unless their legs are something quite out of the common. Not that I would have anything to do with that trade.'

Van Rennan thought it right to clear himself and every one else of any suspicion of smuggling either stockings or letters.

'Nobody wants to smuggle anything,' he said, 'so don't take that idea into your head. Miss Elsie's letter will be properly censored before being dispatched. All you have to do is to get her anything she asks for—anything except gum. I don't know why, but you are not to get her any gum. Is that all clear?'

'No gum, sir. I quite understand.'

'I don't want any gum,' said Elsie. 'It would be no use at all. The sea would wash it away. What I shall want is sealing wax.'

'I'll slip down to my cabin,' said Colonel Wallaby, 'and get my censor's stamp—the official thing, you know—and will do it properly.'

III

'The first thing I want,' said Elsie, 'is an empty bottle.'

She and George had retired to a nook behind the smoking-room bar, where they were not likely to be disturbed. George looked round cheerfully.

'Plenty of bottles here, miss,' he said, 'and them that aren't empty now soon will be. Any particular sort of bottle you've a fancy for, miss? There's beer bottles, lots of them, port, sherry, whisky, besides lime and soft drinks.'

'I want a good big bottle,' said Elsie, 'one that a passing ship would be sure to see if it was floating about, or that any one would pick up if it drifted ashore.'

'If I might make a suggestion, miss, I'd say a champagne bottle. I don't say any one would see it from the bridge of a steamer. Very hard to see a bottle on a rough day. But if it was to come ashore anywhere it would be safe to be picked up. It's my opinion there isn't a man in England, or anywhere else, that wouldn't wade up to his neck to get hold of a bottle of champagne if he saw one floating about. Of course it might be different on a desert island if it was there it came ashore. Natives are often very uneducated. But most of them would know what champagne is.'

'But it won't be a bottle of champagne. Only a champagne bottle. It would have no wine in it.'

'That,' said George, 'is what a man wouldn't know till he'd taken it home and opened it. It would have to be corked, of course.'

'Of course. Otherwise it would get full of water and sink at once. Very well corked, with a lot of sealing wax on top of the cork.'

'That'll be in the purser's store, miss. I'll have to ask him. And it might be as well if you gave me a note to him. The purser is mighty particular about parting with anything.'

'You can tell the purser it's for Mr. Van Rennan. He'll probably think that Uncle Bled wants to make his will on account of the submarines. Wills are sealed, aren't they, George?'

'Never having made one, miss, I couldn't say.'

'I shouldn't think a will would be much good without sealing wax,' said Elsie. She had enjoyed a general education, good as far as it went.

'I could ask the purser about that, miss. He'd be sure to know. A purser has to be a well-educated man on a ship like this.'

'Better not say anything about making a will; the purser can think of that for himself. It wouldn't be true if you said it was for making a will, and it's very wrong to tell lies. I never do, and I don't expect you do either, at least not often. It will be quite enough to say that it's for Mr. Van Rennan, which is almost true if not quite. The purser will give the wax if it's for Mr. Van Rennan.'

Elsie was right about that. Van Rennan had become a power on board. The *Ukrania* was an English ship, and at that time it was the policy of England, government and people alike, to flatter and pacify Americans in every way possible. Even the humblest journalist who visited London was given luncheons and dinners by ladies of title, a particularly agreeable thing to citizens of a country which has no countesses of its own. Mr. Van Rennan being regarded as a man of importance, was particularly well treated. He was, besides, a very wealthy and generous man, and this counts for something in establishing a man's position, especially on shipboard. His friendliness to every one—the use of Christian names for instance, even though sometimes the wrong ones—increased his personal popularity. There was little doubt

that the purser would readily supply him with such a trifling thing as a stick of sealing wax.

'Anything else, miss?' asked George.

'And a good large piece of oil-silk,' she said.

'Oil-silk, miss?'

'Yes. Letters put into bottles must be sewed up in envelopes made of oil-silk. I don't quite know why, but it's always done. At least it was done by the man in the ship I was reading about.'

'We'll have to ask the doctor for that, miss. I don't know any one else in the ship who'd be likely to have any.'

'The doctor?'

Elsie looked doubtful. She was evidently disinclined to ask the doctor for anything.

'I don't think,' she said, 'that the doctor likes me much. He'd be rather inclined to score off me if he could. You see I played him rather a nasty trick and he'll naturally want to get his own back by not giving me any oil-silk if he knows I want it.'

This astonished George. He could not understand how any one could dislike Elsie. Nor did he see how she could have played any trick on the doctor of such a kind as to make him vindictive. Elsie explained this.

'It was most unlucky,' she said. 'The way it happened was this. The first three days it was rather rough and the doctor used to keep on asking me if I felt seasick. I never did, not in the least. You may remember that I ate my dinner every day.'

'You did indeed, miss. Very astonishing I thought it.'

'And very disappointing to the doctor.'

'I'd have thought he'd have been pleased, miss. One less for him to attend to.'

'You evidently don't understand doctors,' said Elsie. 'They want people to be sick. Otherwise, what would be the good of their being doctors? That's why he has it in against me. And if I ask him for a lot of oil-silk he'll simply say No, and then grin with delight.'

The steward had a better opinion of the doctor who

was an amiable man and not the least likely to bear a grudge against Elsie because he had failed to induce her to be seasick.

'So we'll have to get the oil-silk somewhere else.'

This made a difficulty. Except for the doctor's stores there was no other place on the ship where there was likely to be oil-silk, unless some passenger had a private supply, and that, if it existed at all, would be very difficult to get. No one who valued oil-silk sufficiently to carry it about on sea voyages would be likely to part with it.

It was Elsie who made a suggestion.

'I was talking to one of the officers yesterday,' she said, 'that nice one with curly fair hair, quite young, I should say, though of course older than me. He told me all about the life-boats and said that each one had a lot of things ready in it in case of a midnight disaster—submarines, you know. There were a lot of things, but specially each boat had a First Aid outfit, which is quite right. You can't be sure what would happen to any one if a submarine was shooting torpedoes at us. Now I should think, though I don't actually know, that a First Aid outfit would be sure to have oil-silk in it. Most necessary thing for curing wounds of any kind, in fact what's called indispensable. I expect that officer would get me one of those outfits from a boat, if I asked him.'

'I'm sure he wouldn't, miss. No officer would do that.'

'But this one is such a nice boy and his hair is so curly. I expect he would.'

'I'm quite certain he wouldn't, miss.'

'He could put it back again afterwards. We'd take nothing out except the oil-silk. We shouldn't want a lot of things in bottles, most likely smelly, and bandages would be no good to us at all.'

'He'll not do it, miss. You may take my word for that. No officer would do such a thing.'

'He'll be most disobliging then. But if he won't, you'll have to. Uncle Bled said you were to get me anything I wanted and that oil-silk is one of the things I want most.'

Mr. Van Rennan had given just that order. But to rob a ship's lifeboat of part of her emergency stores is a serious, probably a criminal, thing to do. The steward, though for many reasons he wanted to do all he could for Mr. Van Rennan, shrank from this kind of theft. Elsie noticed his hesitation.

'After dark,' she said, 'in the middle of the night when no one would see you. I'd do it myself only that that stewardess of Uncle Bled's always puts me to bed quite early, soon after dinner, and she's sure to spot me if I get up again.'

The steward temporized.

'I'll see what I can do, miss.'

He had no intention of stealing either from the life-boat or even from the doctor, though that would be the lesser crime. But he had thought of a plan by which he might secure the oil-silk without running the risk of serious trouble. There was a stoker who had injured his arm, giving it a rather nasty cut, during the early stormy days of the voyage. He had been going about ever since with his arm in a sling and heavily bandaged. It was likely that such bandages would be wrapped in a covering of oil-silk. The stoker might easily be persuaded to hand over that part of his dressing in return for a very moderate fee. If the doctor, when examining the wound, noticed the absence of the oil-silk, he could be told that it had unfortunately been blown into the sea by a sudden gust of wind. The doctor would not be likely to believe this, but he would be unable to do anything except rate the man for telling lies and warn him with curses not to interfere again with the dressing on his arm.

'Very well,' said Elsie, 'I'll count on you for the oil-silk, and if there's a row afterwards—and there may be, because people make rows about such silly things—I'll get Uncle Bled to do—what is the word? It means the thing we used to do to the Germans before the war. You know what I mean.'

'Appeasement,' said the steward, who was a man who

read newspapers when he could get them and took an interest in politics.

'That's it,' said Elsie. 'Uncle Bled will do the appeasement. Almost anything can be appeased if you're willing to pay up. I've often heard Uncle Bled say that. So if there is a row it won't last long. And I don't myself believe there'll be a row at all.'

The steward agreed with her. There would be no row, or only a very mild one, if the stoker proved amenable.

The next thing, in some ways the most important of all, was the letter itself, the letter which was to make the perilous and very uncertain journey in the champagne bottle. Elsie sat down to it with serious purpose. The steward went to seek the stoker with the injured arm and fortunately found him almost at once.

Elsie's first difficulty was she had no idea what to write about, having been forbidden to say that the *Ukrania* was wrecked. She began by writing in large letters a kind of greeting across the top of the paper.

TO WHOEVER FINDS THIS BOTTLE

After some thought she changed 'whoever' into 'whomsoever,' which seemed a more dignified word. Then, since this seemed cold and formal, whereas she wanted to be friendly to the unknown finder of the bottle, she added:

WITH LOVE FROM ELSIE ELTON

Her real difficulty began after this, and for a time she got no further. She was hampered by what Mr. Van Rennan had said about the inconvenience which might be caused to a battleship sent off to a desert island in search of a shipwrecked crew. She was, occasionally, an obedient and conscientious child. She thought it better to make the position plain at once.

'I am not really shipwrecked,' she wrote, 'only pretending, so there is no need to go searching for me or the rest of the crew.'

After that there seemed nothing else to say. But it

would be a pity to send so short a letter on what was likely to be such a romantic journey. After much hesitation she wrote :

'I am only a little girl, nine years old at my last birthday, which was in June. Please tell me when your birthday is. Or if you are too old to have a birthday, and I know old people like Daddy and Uncle Bled haven't birthdays, though they must have had them long ago, though they don't want to think of them any more. But if you are young like me tell me when your birthday is, for I want to send you a present, saying whether boy or girl for the presents would have to be different whichever you are. Also say where you live when you write to me. I do not live anywhere, just now being on a ship, and no letter ever comes to ships at sea. But soon I shall be in New York, which is in America, and my address will be——'

Here there was another pause. She had to go to Mr. Van Rennan to find out what her address in America would be. He was at a critical moment in the middle of a game of bridge, having just declared Grand Slam in no-trumps. It is all to his credit that he gave her an address, that of his office—indeed, the first one that came into his mind.'

Elsie completed her letter.

'24 West 51st Street, New York City. Ever your loving friend,

'ELSIE ELTON.'

To this she added eight crosses representing kisses.

By the time she had finished this the bridge hand was played out to a triumphant conclusion. She handed the letter to Colonel Wallaby, who this time had been the lawyer's partner, had lost the game, and was not in a good temper.

'Now then, Wallaby, get out your censor's stamp, sign your name and say hand and seal, act and deed.'

'I can't pass this,' he said, laying down the rubber stamp which he had brought from his cabin.

'Can't see why not,' said the sailor. He had read the letter over Colonel Wallaby's shoulder. 'It's perfectly innocent. Not a word about a soldier in it, and gum isn't mentioned, though I don't see why it shouldn't be.'

Colonel Wallaby pointed to the row of crosses at the bottom of the sheet.

'That might be a code,' he said.

'Damn it, man,' said the sailor, 'those are kisses. It can't be against the law to send kisses to a friend. All little girls put kisses in their letters. My own two put rows and rows of them whenever they write to me.'

'It's against the censorship rules,' said Colonel Wallaby, 'to put cabalistic signs in letters.'

That was true. To an actual kiss impressed by human lips on a sheet of paper there can be no objection, but to kisses represented by crosses there is, very properly, a very strong objection. They might be a means of conveying valuable information to an enemy.

'When is a kiss a cabalistic sign?' said the lawyer. 'That question might go up to the House of Lords and I hope I'll be briefed on one side or the other when it does.'

Colonel Wallaby scowled at him. He hated flippancy on serious subjects. Mr. Van Rennan was heartily tired of the discussion and wanted to get back to his bridge. He picked up the censor's stamp from the table, pressed it on the back of Elsie's letter and then scribbled his signature underneath. Colonel Wallaby stared at him with horror and wild surprise.

'Are you aware,' he said, 'that the penalties for what you have just done are——' Here he paused. He was not sure about the penalties. No one had ever dared to do such a thing before. Nor was it regarded as possible that any one ever would. There were no penalties provided by law.

'Take it away, Elsie,' said Van Rennan. 'Send it off in your bottle.'

'If you are prosecuted afterwards,' said the lawyer, 'I'll defend you. It will be a pleasure to me.'

PART III

INNISHBOFIN

I

INNISHBOFIN lies off the west coast of Connaught, stretching out into the Atlantic as if it had turned its back on Europe and was reaching out a hand of greeting to that 'land of the free' to which so many young men and maidens have gone seeking new and wider life. Or perhaps Innishbofin does not look so far or look to the future at all. Perhaps, out in the Atlantic, she seeks and dreams over the Land of the Ever Young, that fabled Paradise of Celtic imagination. Perhaps it is of past glories and vanished hopes that the sea murmurs against her shores. It is the strange destiny of Innishbofin to have a heart divided between the impatient progress of America and the dim visions of a romantic past.

The name itself speaks of neither. Translated, it is the Island of the White Cow, a name too rural to suggest Chicago, too homely for saints, scholars, and mighty heroes. White cows are rare anywhere. On Innishbofin there are none at all. All the cows there are brown, small and very lean, for the pasture is scant and of poor quality. That is the Bofin part of the name. The other half is equally inappropriate, for Innish means an island, and this land, though it reaches out far into the sea, is not that. Once it was. A very narrow strait separated it from the mainland, a strait through which the tides ran fiercely. For the convenience of the islanders a ferry boat plied across the strait. But, not being a very efficient ferry, it could not face the tides and made its passage only at slack water, the short periods at high tide and at the bottom of the ebb when the tide ceases to run either way. This was inconvenient, for the hours at which the ferry plied were different every day. But the inconvenience

was never felt to be a grievance. It was only on rare occasions that any one wanted to go to the mainland. No one from the mainland ever wanted to go to Innishbofin.

Then came an English Chief Secretary, one of those amiable foreign governors who tried to benefit the land of their exile, while building up for themselves a reputation for statesmanship at home. They seldom succeeded in either endeavour, never in both. This Chief Secretary built a bridge from the mainland to Innishbofin, thereby putting the ferry out of business and enabling the islanders to cross the strait at any hour of the day or night. It is a strong stone bridge and has stood there for many years. Thus Innishbofin is a complete misname. The place is no longer an island and there are no white cows on it.

In spite of this link with what some may regard as a higher civilization, the inhabitants of Innishbofin are a people somewhat apart, and retain many of the peculiarities which mark them as an island race. Innishbofin is, or was, one of the last strongholds of the Gaelic language, which was there used for the common intercourse of daily life. It must be distinguished from the Gaelic now taught in schools to unwilling pupils by masters who are often equally unwilling. The native language still survives, mixed with English, among people who do not know to which tongue a word belongs. A man, for instance, will say that at a certain time he was seated at his fireside 'succor and easy', if it happens to be desirable to establish an alibi. He is unaware that in emphasizing his peacefulness at home he is using two languages, and that the one word is a translation of the other. A woman, driven to fury by a naughty child, will threaten the offender with a 'thaw may saustha' beating, meaning a beating which it will be a satisfaction to her to administer. She does not realize that in her description of the punishment she is reverting to the language of her mother and grandmother.

Along with this survival of the language there must be counted among the characteristics of the men of Innish-

bofin a devotion to politics of the most thoroughgoing and logical kind. No half-measures satisfy them. Compromise is reckoned as one of the seven deadly sins replacing in the list *luxuria* to which through the extreme poverty of their soil they are not tempted. Nowhere is the desire for an entirely independent Irish Republic more general. Nowhere else is the very name of England more detested. Nowhere is there a more flourishing regiment, if regiment is the right word, of the Irish Republican Army.

Nor is this ardent republicanism merely a factious kind of politics. It draws its inspiration from the poetry of the old bards, poetry which still lives deep down in the soul of the people, though it seldom finds expression in words. For these men Ireland is still the Duve Kan Deelish, the 'dear dark head', or 'little dark rose,' the symbol of Kathaleen the daughter of Houlahan, to whom 'the King's son will' some day 'come again', though what use a King's son would be to a republic the scoffing Saxon might inquire with scorn.

On Innishbofin, besides scattered cottages, there are two or three straggling villages. One of them lies at the eastern end of Tramore, the great strand. From the village the strand runs brown and lonely to a tall cliff which, southward and westward, withstands the heavy seas of the winter gales, the last desolate outpost of a desolate land. At the far end of the strand under the shelter of the cliff is a cottage, perhaps the poorest, certainly the loneliest, in the island. Here is none of the comforting companionship of the village cottages, huddled together. Church and school can be reached only by a long tramp across the damp windswept strand.

This is the home of Thaddacus Phelim, his wife Bridget, his twelve-year-old daughter Maureen, and a small son still little more than a baby. Thaddaeus would have described himself as a farmer and a fisherman, but the words are wildly misleading to English ears. He is no sturdy yeoman surveying with pride his ripening wheat, or gazing at the lush fields where his kine graze and grow

fat. Nor, as fisherman, does he stand on the bridge of a trawler, a weathered sea dog, in bold command.

Thaddaeus, the farmer, plants potatoes in a narrow strip of peaty soil. He digs trenches with a spade, forks into them, as manure, damp sea weed dragged with great toil by his wife from the rocks at the base of the cliff. She carries it on her back in a dripping creel while her husband digs. Before the digging and planting he burns the soil in order to increase—in the end destroy—its fertility, at that season covering the land with a pale green smoke. Beside the potato patch is a field, hardly to be called a field, of thin-growing oats. Here and there, wandering forlornly, are his two little cows with half-grown calves following them. Such is the farming of this farmer. And as for fishing— On rare calm days, for Thaddaeus is no daring seaman, he will carry on his head and over his shoulders his canvas curragh from its shelter under the lee of his cottage wall down to the sea and launch it, in the hope of finding among the rocks beneath the cliffs some fish which can be hooked.

Always, digging with bent back, or within earshot of the sea roaring in deep hollow caves, Thaddaeus has in him, half realized, a vision of the ancient glories of the land of saints and scholars and a fierce hope that those glories may someday come again, fought for and splendidly won. Meanwhile he is poor, as poor as any man can be who lives at all. Innishbofin is poor with him, poor in substance but rich in dreams as perhaps only the very poor can be. Nor, if the choice were given him and he understood the alternative, would he prefer the social security of a Beveridge paradise to his heritage of dreams which never can come true.

Off the furthest edge of the cliff is a tiny island called Ilaun An Anama, which means the Island of Souls. Certain Englishmen coming here translated the name and set it on their charts as Sole Island. Their minds turned to fried fish when Phelim and his ancestors were thinking of the immortal part of man.

The school in the village at the eastern end of the strand is a full three miles distant from Phelim's cottage. This journey Maureen makes day after day unless there is a full gale blowing in from the Atlantic. She walks close to the edge of the sea where the sand is hard and walking much easier than it would be above high-water mark where she would have to go through soft, powdery sand. It matters little to her that the waves sometimes wash up round her ankles. Like most children on Innishbofin, she goes barefooted, her only shoes and stockings being too precious to be used for everyday walks.

On a gloomy afternoon in mid-November, Maureen made this accustomed walk. It was half-past three when she left the school. It would be later than half-past four when she reached home. There was not much to look forward to in the cottage and no need for hurrying.

The afternoon darkened fast. There were black clouds gathering in the western sky. The seagulls were flying fast inland. These are sure signs of a coming gale. The waves, driven by the great rollers far out in the Atlantic, came hurrying ever faster and more angrily to break on the strand. They curled over, crashed, and then rushed up in long smooth swirls, white-lipped. Spongy lumps of yellow foam raced each other across the strand till they came to a quivering rest far up.

Maureen, accustomed to all kinds of weather and the behaviour of the sea, paid little heed to the gathering gloom, the rising waves and the whiteness, more visible as the sky drew darker, of the foam on the curling tops of breaking seas. Then something away ahead of her attracted her attention. The seagulls paused in their flight and swooped down, touched the water with bills and wing-tips, then with shrill cries rose again and resumed their flight shorewards. Something in the water, on or near the surface, had awakened in them hopes of prey or food. Something disappointed bird after bird, proving the flotsam to be valueless to them.

Maureen quickened her pace and looked. A little way

out in the space just beyond each wave's breaking place there was something floating. For a time, while Maureen watched, the waves passed it. Then one wave, bigger than the others, curled up sooner to its breaking point. The floating object, which had disappointed the gulls, was swept into the rising crest of the great wave, flung swiftly forward, was buried for a moment in the foam and then was driven racing up the sand.

Maureen saw clearly what it was—a bottle.

There is nothing very strange in the washing up of a bottle, though indeed on the strand of Innishbofin bottles are rare. But there was something which struck Maureen as unusual about this bottle. It floated buoyantly, quite unlike a water-filled bottle, empty when it was flung in to the sea from the side of some vessel. The retreating waves dragged the bottle seawards again, but it was now well within the range of the foaming water. The next wave brought it to the strand again. Maureen waded out knee deep into the coming swirl of water, plunged in her arm and caught the bottle.

II

Inside Phelim's cottage the afternoon darkened quickly. There are in the kitchen only two small windows, with little panes of thick glass, giving, even on sunny days, little light. For light, and indeed for ventilation, the room depends on the 'half door'. In west of Ireland cottages of the poorer kind the entrance door is made in two parts, each hung on its own hinges. The lower half is kept shut, a barrier against pigs and other intruding animals. The upper part, the 'half door', swings open except at night or in very bad weather. Through it comes most of the light and all the air there is inside. Through it also come hens, which easily flutter across the lower part of the door.

Bridget, wife of Phelim and mother of Maureen, peering out of the half door, saw her little girl coming along the

strand. She noticed with some surprise that the child stopped, waded into the sea, stooped and then resumed her walk. Bridget wondered a little, for the water was cold, and though paddling may be attractive to an English child on Weymouth beach in August, there is small pleasure in it for an Innishbofin child on a November afternoon.

But Bridget was little interested. She turned back into the kitchen. There a small boy, too young for the long walk to school, lay flat on his stomach before a smouldering turf fire. In front of him was an egg which he turned among the hot ashes, roasting it, a business which requires some skill. He was a kindly and affectionate child, this younger Thaddaeus. Having found the egg, laid by an errant hen under a whinbush, he regarded it as his own property, and was preparing it for Maureen, to be added to her dinner when she returned from school. It would be a welcome addition to a meal which otherwise would consist of nothing but boiled potatoes, and perhaps—Bridget also was planning a small treat for her daughter. In her frying-pan was some congealed fat. This she meant to heat into a liquid and Maureen would be allowed to dip her potatoes into it, thereby adding flavour to the dull food. Bridget approached her hearth, pushed the baby boy out of the way with her foot, very much as if he had been a little dog. She piled fresh sods of turf on the fire and blew them into a flame. She readjusted a black pot which hung from a hook at the end of a chain fastened to a bar somewhere far up the chimney. The pot contained the potatoes reserved for Maureen's dinner.

Thaddaeus sat, crouched, on a narrow triangular slab of stone built into the wall of the wide chimney. His day's work had ended when the darkness came and the storm began to rise. He gazed into the fire, silent, dreary. When his wife blew the embers into a blaze he blinked and stirred, some thoughts disturbed, if indeed anything as definite as a thought had been in his mind.

Bridget took down from the nail on which it hung a small lamp, filled it with oil, trimmed the wick, lit it

and hung it up again above her husband's head. The light it gave was feeble, for Bridget had not cleaned the smoke-stained glass of the chimney. He seemed grateful even for this light. From a shelf above his head he took a book. Bound in tattered green cloth and printed in painfully small type on faded paper, the book contained the works of Mitchell, one of the heroes of the hundred years past Young Ireland Movement. The book had been read and re-read, as books are when they are the property of a man who has very few and yet is cursed with something of a student's mind. Holding the book so that the light from the lamp fell on it, then shifting it somewhat to catch a brighter light from the fire, Thaddaeus read the stark prose of Mitchell, who of all Irishmen comes nearest to Swift in the strength of his writing.

Maureen, her walk completed, pushed open the door and came in. She clutched her bottle in her arms. Bridget lifted the pot from its hook and poured the potatoes from it, making a pile of them on the deal table. Thus, without tablecloth, plate or fork, Maureen was accustomed every day to eat her dinner. The little boy came to his sister proudly offering his roasted egg. Bridget held the frying-pan over the fire while the grease sizzled. Thaddaeus, hardly noticing his daughter's coming, was absorbed in Mitchell's passionate nationalism. Maureen set down her bottle on the table beside the potatoes.

'What's that you're after bringing in with you?' said Bridget.

'It's a bottle,' said Maureen, a child who did not waste words.

'It's a mighty queer bottle then. I don't know did I ever see the like of it before.'

It was not likely that she had. Champagne is rare, if not totally unknown on Innishbofin, and if by any chance a bottle strayed to the island it certainly would not have been brought to Phelim's cottage.

'Thady——' It was thus that Bridget and most of his friends abbreviated the formal Thaddaeus. 'Thady,

will you look at what Maureen is after bringing home with her? It wasn't in school she got that, unless it might be some new kind of learning they're teaching you. Mighty queer things they do in schools now, different from what was in it when I was a girl. Is it that now? What's called electricity or the like?'

'It is not,' said Maureen.

Thaddaeus, roused from his book, stood up. Bridget picked up the bottle.

'There's a cork in it,' she said, 'a queer kind of a cork. I don't know did I ever see a cork like this before.'

She scratched at the hard sealing wax with her thumb-nail.

'Hard it is,' she said, 'as if it might be iron. Are you sure now it isn't something the teacher has been giving you to learn?'

'It is not,' said Maureen.

Thaddaeus took the bottle from his wife and turned it round in his hands examining it carefully.

He drew a heavy clasp-knife from his pocket and began to chip at the sealing wax which covered the cork. The purser on the *Ukrania* had been generous. There was a thick covering on top of the cork and the bottle was covered with it half way down the neck.

'I'd be in favour of seeing what's in it,' he said, 'whether it's out of the sea it came or from some other place.'

'Mind what you're at, now, Thady,' said Bridget. 'If so be that it came out of the sea, which is what Maureen says—'

'It did,' said Maureen.

'Then you couldn't tell,' said Bridget, 'but it might be one of the contraptions that the English do be putting into the sea to murder the Germans with. The poor fellows! I wouldn't like for it to be going off and blowing us all up. It's all very well to be killing Germans or English either for that matter, but I've no liking for being killed myself.'

'It's no such thing,' said Thaddaeus. 'Wouldn't you hear the little clock ticking in the inside of it if it was what they call an infernal machine? I've read about them and I know the nature of them. There's little clocks inside of them. Didn't our boys use the same in London one time, and put the fear of God into the English parliament, no less.'

Bridget had never read anything herself and so had a great respect for anything which came out of books or was even printed in a paper. She protested no more. Thaddaeus went on with his chipping until he laid bare the top of the cork. This, though he had no corkscrew, was easily dealt with. Opening a spike which lay flat on the back of his knife, he picked at the cork until he got it, in fragments, out of the neck of the bottle. He held the bottle to his nose and sniffed.

'It's not whisky, anyway,' he said, 'nor it's not likely that it would be. Who'd be fool enough to throw a bottle of whisky into the sea whether he'd put a cork in it or not?'

'Unless it might be some that the boys are after making in the mountainy stills,' said Bridget; 'there's little whisky in Innishbofin, and maybe'—here she sighed gently, 'the people is as well without it.'

'Would any one,' said Thaddaeus, 'be throwing whisky into the sea, whether it was potheen or any other sort? And wouldn't you get the reck of it out of the bottle if there'd been whisky in it? Have sense, Bridget.'

III

Thaddaeus shook the bottle. There was no answering gurgle of liquid or rattle of any solid body inside.

'It's empty it is,' he said, 'and that's a queer thing too. Why would any one be corking up a bottle and putting wax on it if there was nothing inside it? And there isn't. There's no sense in the thing at all. Here

now, Maureen, let you take it and throw it back into the sea if it's there it came from."

But Maureen had more faith in the bottle and was not willing to abandon such a strange find. She held it slantwise near the smoky lamp so that a faint ray of light shone down the neck.

'There's something in it be the same more or less,' she said.

Bridget took the bottle from her. She picked up a piece of wire which lay on the shelf in the chimney corner, among some fishing lines and Thaddaeus' small library of precious books. She poked this into the bottle.

'There's some sort of a bit of soft stuff in it,' she said. 'It could be that it's an old rag or the like of that.'

'Rags!' said Thaddaeus. 'What sense is there in rags?'

Convinced that the bottle was uninteresting he returned to his seat and picked up Mitchell's book again. He opened it at the often read pages of the 'Jail Journal.' In a minute he was absorbed again in that passionate story and the dreams which the reading aroused.

'It will fail me to get it out,' said Bridget, still poking with her piece of wire. 'Without we break the bottle there'll be no getting out what's in it.'

'It might be gold,' said Maureen. 'Or it might be silver.'

'It might be the crown of the Queen of Spain,' said Bridget scornfully, 'if so be the crown was made of a bit of old blanket! Amn't I after telling you that whatever is in it is soft? Will I break the bottle, now, Maureen, or will I not?'

'You will,' said Maureen, who had not given up hope of some valuable treasure. Bridget hesitated.

'I'd be afear'd to do the like,' she said. 'It's what I was saying to your Da a minute ago. It's killed we might be, killed and strewed about in smithereens if it's one of them things they do be putting in to the sea to murder the Germans with.'

Maureen took the bottle from her mother's hand.

'It was me that found it,' she said, 'and it's me should break it.'

'If so be it must be broke,' said Bridget, 'but it would be better left alone.'

Her hopes of valuable contents were small and she was haunted by a dread of sea-mines, of which there was much talk among the islanders.

Maureen picked up a spade which was lying in a corner of the kitchen. It seemed a good instrument with which to break a bottle.

'It's terrible venturesome you are,' said Bridget, 'but that's what you always were, and it's not after me you took it. If it was me and not you I'd be sitting down eating the dinner that's there on the table instead of blowing yourself up with gunpowder or worse.'

The baby boy seemed to be of the same opinion. He caught Maureen's sleeve and pressed the roasted egg into her hand.

'If so be that you must do it,' said Bridget, 'will you take it outside and do it there? Isn't it enough to be killing yourself without killing the little lad and me along with you? It's outside the houseen you must do it, and you'd better not be taking the spade with you. Your Da would be terrible angry if the spade was to be broke, and broke it might be. Get along with you now, down to the rocks, and you'll put the bottle into the sea before you break it, if you'll be said by me. But well I know it's no use talking to you. It's a terrible headstrong girlreen you are and always were.'

Maureen, though too headstrong to give up the attempt to get at the contents of the bottle, was not wholly heedless of her mother's commands and advice. She put down the spade and left the cottage carrying the bottle with her. She went down to the end of the strand where the rocks at the bottom of the cliff are. There she found a shallow pool and put the bottle in it. If there was to be an explosion, and her mother might be right in expect-

ing that, it was better that it should take place under water. And, this was a consoling thought, gunpowder is less likely to go off if it is thoroughly wet. So Maureen believed, but her knowledge of modern explosives was very small.

She sought and found a heavy stone. With this she battered the bottle until she knocked off the neck. To her relief there was no bang, and except for a cut on her hand, made by the breaking glass, she was uninjured. She had her reward. Inside the bottle was a small packet carefully sewed up in oil-silk. This might not, indeed certainly could not, contain the Queen of Spain's crown, but it was plainly something different from a bundle of old and useless rags. She carried it into the cottage and gave it to her mother.

'Will you look at that now,' she said.

Bridget's curiosity was awakened. She was almost as anxious as her daughter to see what the package contained. Her fear of an explosion had vanished. Now that the bottle was broken there seemed no risk of that. She fetched her scissors from the basket in which she kept the instruments of such needlework as she did, chiefly patching torn garments. She snipped carefully at the stitches.

'Will it be diamonds?' asked Maureen.

'It might,' said Bridget who had become hopeful. The packet was well and tightly sewn. There was likely to be something valuable inside.

'Or it might be rubies,' said Maureen.

'It might,' said Bridget.

The snipping of the stitches was finished. She unfolded the oil-silk and drew out the letter which had been written in the smoking-room of the *Ukrania* by Elsie Elton.

This was a disappointment. A letter is a poor substitute for diamonds and rubies, but even a letter is better than nothing. Bridget spread it out and peered at it.

'Here,' she said, 'let you read it, Maureen. You've had more schooling than ever I had. I never was much

at reading writing and I wouldn't say I was much good at the print now. It's little need I have of the like, thanks be to God.'

The round schoolgirl's writing was easy enough for Maureen, but the light was very dim. In order to read at all she had to carry it in to the chimney corner and hold it close under the smoky lamp. This cast a heavy shadow over Mitchell's 'Jail Journal' and roused Thaddaeus from his reading.

'What's that you have?' he said. 'And what are you doing with it? How am I to be reading if you come between me and the light?'

'It's a letter,' said Maureen.

'It's a letter,' said Bridget, 'a letter which came out of the bottle when Maureen broke it, and I'm thinking it had better be read, though I might be hard set to read it myself, which is why I'm after giving it to Maureen. But it might be that you could read it better than her, you that's well used to studying books and Latin and Greek and all sorts. A letter would be nothing to you, though Maureen might be equal to it. It's great schooling they get these times, better than there was in it when I was a girlreen.'

Thaddaeus took the letter, though Maureen was not very willing to part with it. He was, as his wife said, well accustomed to reading, though she gave him too much credit when she said he read Latin and Greek.

He read it aloud, slowly and distinctly.

'There's no sense in it,' he said.

He handed it back to Maureen and picked up his book again.

'There is sense,' said Maureen.

'Indeed and there is,' said her mother. 'It's from a grand young lady somewhere over the broad sea and she's wanting to be giving a present to Maureen on her birthday. Isn't that sense enough for anyone? It's few have as much sense as that. It might be a new dress she'd be giving her, and the Lord knows she wants it.'

'It might be diamonds,' said Maureen hopefully, 'or it might be rubies.'

'And all she has to do is to write and ask for it,' said Bridget. 'It's well fit you are to write a letter to the young lady after all the schooling you've had walking the length of Tramore and back till the feet is pretty near worn off you. Are you fit to write that letter or are you not, Maureen?'

'I am.'

'You hear that, now, Thady,' said Bridget. 'She can write it herself and there'll be no need to be troubling you.'

'She can write if it pleases her, but she might as well not. There's no sense in it.' Thaddaeus was not a hopeful man. Few students of history are.

Maureen, turning the letter over in her hand, discovered on the back of it Colonel Wallaby's censor's stamp and below it Van Rennan's scribbled signature.

'Will you look at that?' she said.

Bridget looked and passed the suggestion on to her husband.

'Let you take a look at that, Thady,' she said, 'for it's beyond me. It must be some high-up lady that has the like of that put on her letters.'

The 'Examined by the Censor' was plain enough printing even for Bridget's reading. But letters are rare in Innishbofin, and not more than three or four came to Phelim's cottage in the course of a year. Bridget had never before seen one with a censor's stamp on it. Nor, indeed, had her husband. Moved by curiosity he took the letter from her hand and examined the censor's stamp. Van Rennan's signature, which took the place of the usual number, completely baffled him. It was, as many signatures are, illegible; for comparatively few men can write their own names. He regarded it with deep suspicion for a while. Then, oddly enough, with rising hope. Being a member of an underground movement he knew that important communications are often made in apparently innocent language, with some secret mark on them.

The censor's stamp struck him as something of the sort. Van Rennan's signature confirmed his suspicions. It was, or seemed to him, plainly impossible to take Elsie's letter as meaning what it said. Nobody would write such a letter or put it in a bottle if he did. It seemed to Thaddaeus that there must be some hidden meaning. Unfortunately he did not possess any clue to what that meaning might be.

'How did that letter come here?' he asked.

'You know that well enough,' said Bridget. 'It was out of the bottle it came, the same that Maureen brought home with her. She broke it on the stone by the side of the shore, going there with it so she wouldn't be disturbing you if so be it was one of them things that kill Germans. Nor she didn't want to break your spade either, which is what she might have done if she'd used it to break the bottle and there was gunpowder in it. You wouldn't have been pleased if the spade had been broke. You might have taken the stick to her which is what she wouldn't like.'

'It was out of the sea it came at the first go off,' said Maureen.

'And why would the sea be bringing it to Tramore?' said Thaddaeus.

This was a question which might have puzzled an older and wiser person than Maureen. But she was an intelligent child, and, as her mother often reminded her, she was receiving a very superior education.

'It was the gulf-stream did it,' she said.

'You hear that, now, Thady,' said Bridget. 'It's what they do be teaching her in school. Gulf-streams and learning of all sorts.'

'Gulf-streams be damned,' said Thaddaeus.

Then he fell silent again, but this time not to read Mitchell's masterpiece. He was pondering the mystery of the letter, and gradually came to feel sure that it contained some secret, some political secret—his mind ran much on such subjects—sent by a distant friend to those

at home who were planning a master stroke for the liberty of Ireland. The censor's stamp and the illegible signature under it no doubt conveyed to those initiate the news that the letter ought to be read with the aid of a key to a code. Otherwise, as Thaddaeus had said before, there was no sense in it. It was plainly his duty to pass on the letter to some one who would understand it. And who was more likely to do that than his friend Michael McCarthy, the master in the school in the village beyond the strand? Michael was a man noted for the vehemence of his patriotism, as well as the wideness of his learning. Gulf-streams, if such things existed, would present no difficulties to him.

'You'll give that letter to me,' he said to Maureen.

'I will not,' said Maureen.

'What good is it to you?' said Bridget. 'It's Maureen it's sent to.'

'It is not Maureen,' said Thaddaeus. 'It's me that it's for. Me and others that will know the use of it. Men that's high up and has the love of Ireland in their hearts.'

Bridget knew very well that there were such men, dangerous men, with whom her husband held secret meetings, who had passwords and signs unknown to her. She was duly impressed by the suggestion that the letter might be meant for them.

'You'd better be giving it to your Da, Maureen,' she said.

'It'll be the worse for her if she doesn't give it to me this instant minute,' said Thaddaeus.

Maureen thought that this was very likely to be true. She had no wish to experience the threatened 'worse'. She handed over the letter without further protest.

But she was a determined child and was by no means inclined to sacrifice the chance of a birthday present which might be diamonds or rubies. She read again, and fixed in her memory, the address to which reply to the mysterious letter should be sent.

Thaddaeus, the letter in his pocket, put away his book and went out from the fireside for his long walk along the strand. In the village at the far end he would find Michael McCarthy and with his aid discover the secret of the letter. He, dreamer and half poet, hoped for something far more precious than the rubies and diamonds of which his daughter thought. Through his mind as he went out into the dark and the storm ran the moving lines of a poet later in date than Mangan or the New Irelanders :

Shall mine eyes behold thy glory, oh my country ? Shall mine
eyes behold thy glory ?
Or shall death have closed upon them e're the sunlight break at
length upon thy story ?

IV

There is no more loyal and faithful wife anywhere than Bridget Phelim. She interpreted her vow of obedience quite literally and insisted that Maureen, and as far as possible the small boy, should do what their Da told them, however vexatious and unreasonable the order might be. She respected and appreciated the amount of work her husband did for her and her family on the land, at sea, and, most laboriously, on the bog, when the winter fuel was dug and gathered home. She willingly regarded him as the breadwinner, and thought her own work nothing as compared to his.

But, like most good women, she had a secret contempt for those parts of her husband's activities which she did not understand. His fondness for reading over and over again the few books he owned was regarded by Bridget as ' foolishness ', the kind of foolishness which many good and worthy men suffer from. His romantic politics—the Dark Rosaleen view of Ireland—was foolishness too, but a worse kind of foolishness, for Bridget, though not exactly anxious, was vaguely aware that patriotism in extreme forms often led to unpleasantness and even trouble. But

nothing would have induced her to utter any word of criticism of her husband, or to hint, even to her daughter, that Thaddaeus was anything but wise and good. Hers was the attitude of many excellent women. Their men, husbands, brothers, even sons, are only half-grown boys, to be guided into the ways of sense by women, to whom sense comes naturally, and to be tolerated, even encouraged in foolishness which does no actual harm. Reading books was certainly waste of time which might otherwise be spent usefully in mending nets. Dreams of the past greatness and future glories of Kathleen-ny-Houlahan were totally incomprehensible to her. But many husbands did worse. There were some who drank too much. There were many who, without actual excess, spent savings on whisky in some public-house. Thaddaeus did not frequent drinking shops, and if he spent an occasional evening at a meeting of a patriotic secret society—well, the best of men must have some amusement outside their own homes on dark evenings.

But Bridget, for all her loyalty, was not inclined to allow her husband's 'foolishness' to interfere with the welfare of her children or herself. He might choose to regard the mysterious letter found in the bottle as a message in code from some distant friend of Eire. He had, indeed, carried it off with him for a consultation with his friends, a secret consultation, at which, no doubt, some plausible meaning for the letter might be guessed. Bridget herself was inclined to take the document at its face value. Some unknown person wanted to give Maureen a present. It might not be 'diamonds and rubies', but it would be something worth having if it could be had at so small an expense as a postage stamp for the answering of the letter.

Thaddaeus might perhaps forbid Maureen's writing. If he did Bridget would forbid it too. But Thaddaeus had made no such order, and the meeting he had gone to attend might take a long time. These meetings generally did. Bridget and Maureen had the cottage to themselves for the evening. The letter would be answered.

The deal table, off which Maureen ate her potatoes every day, was cleared and partly cleaned. A sheet of paper, torn from a school exercise book, was spread out. Maureen sat down to her task.

'*A chara deelish*,' she began.

She read out the words as she wrote them to Bridget, who had some difficulty in reading even her own daughter's writing.

'What's that?' she said.

'It's the way they learn us at school to be beginning any letter we might be wishful to write. Irish it is, though I couldn't rightly say the meaning of it, only that it's the way letters should be at the first go off.'

'Irish, indeed,' said Bridget. 'My mother did be talking Irish when I was a girleen, the way I might be talking English, that coming easy to her, but it wasn't the same as what they are teaching you at school. Not that I wouldn't be in favour of your learning it whatever it is, the same as I would be in favour of your learning anything else they might teach you, for education is a grand thing and it's often I'm sorry I didn't get more of it. Only that's no way to be beginning a letter to a young lady who mightn't be accustomed to the Irish, either your kind or my mother's.'

'If I'm not to begin that way,' said Maureen, 'how am I to begin?'

'There's a sister of mine,' said Bridget, 'the same that's your Aunt Katie, who is married on a man they call Connelly, up in Dublin, but before she took up with him she was in service in one of them grand houses, a castle it was, no less, though I disremember the name of it. And what she told me was this, that if you were speaking to the woman of the house it was 'your ladyship' you called her, and I'm thinking that if you was writing a letter to her, which is what your Aunt Katie never did, nor never wanted to, it's the same way you'd be beginning the letter.'

Maureen was quite ready to take advice, and Aunt Katie

evidently spoke with some authority, but she had spent time and trouble in writing '*a chara deelish*.' It seemed a pity to scratch it out. She left it at the top of the paper and wrote 'Your Ladyship' underneath.

'It could be,' said Bridget, 'that she's not your ladyship seeing she's not more than nine years old and I'm thinking that's too young to be a ladyship. But what harm, anyway? If she's not a ladyship she'll be wishing she was, and it will please her to be called it.'

Here Bridget showed wisdom. It is better, in case of doubt, to address a man as Colonel rather than Captain. If he is only entitled to the lower prefix, he is pleased at the promotion, whereas if he is a Colonel and you put Captain on the envelope you irritate him at once. The same rule governs all correspondence. A woman is Mrs. unless she has clearly said she is Miss. A clergyman should be at least Prebendary unless there is good evidence that he is only a curate.

'I am a little girl,' Maureen wrote, 'and I am twelve years old. I go to school. Do you? I learn about the gulf-stream which is very useful to know. And the Irish which we all ought to on account of living in Ireland. My birthday is in August, but that is a long way from now, this being November. So if so be that you are sending me a present it might be better not to wait so long. It is something made of gold I would like best, never having seen any gold, it not being common in Innishbofin which is where I live.'

Here Bridget interrupted the writing. In her opinion—and she was a woman of great practical sense—it is not wise to appear to be grasping. By asking for gold Maureen might lose the chance of getting any present at all. Maureen, an obedient child, was ready to do as her mother advised. What she was not willing to do was to spoil the look of her letter with erasures. Hitherto it had gone on with nothing worse than an occasional change in the spelling of a word. It would be a pity to cross out two whole sentences.

'My Ma says,' she added, 'that a new dress might be better, but I don't know would it, though it might. Please do not tell my Da that I am writing to you. It might not be pleasing to him if he knew, for he's thinking that your letter was something different entirely and was for him, though it was me found the bottle. He had no right to take it away which is what he did, on account of his being great at the ancient glories of Ireland.'

'You'll score that bit out, Maureen,' said her mother. 'I'll not have you writing things against your Da. There might be trouble coming to him and the whole of us, if the English was to take it into their heads that he was anyways against them on account of the way they do be killing Germans, and it could be they'd think that, for they haven't much sense, them same English.'

'My Ma says,' wrote Maureen, still determined to keep her letter unspoiled, 'that it might not be the way I say about my Da and that he'd kill a German himself if he was to see one, which isn't likely he will for there's not many about these parts.'

'There's no harm in that,' said Bridget, with mild approval, 'though I wouldn't say myself that your Da would murder a German, nor any one else unless it might be an Orangeman out of Belfast, and he'd be a queer one who'd fault a man for doing that. They'd be no loss them ones if they were dead, so I hear them saying, anyway. It's little attention I pay to murders, anyway.'

'The paper is nearly done,' said Maureen. 'Will I stop?'

'You will,' said her mother.

'*Mise le meas mor*,' wrote Maureen.

'More of your Irish,' said her mother. 'Didn't I tell you not?'

'It's what should be at the end of a letter,' said Maureen, 'and what's more, it's spelled right.'

'It may be,' said Bridget, 'but I'd not be in favour of it. You might be putting the young lady against you if you write what she can't understand, which is likely

enough with the Irish they teach you in school, which is different from what was spoke when I was a girl.'

Maureen, following her usual plan, wrote an alternative ending.

'Your loving friend, Maureen Phelim.'

Then, since there was still a little paper left, she added by way of a postscript:

'It's on INNISHBOFIN I live, at the end of Tramore, and any one would know the place for there's ne'er another houseen only this one on the west of the strand.'

Bridget, having listened to the end of the letter, left Maureen to copy Elsie's address on to the envelope. She crossed the room, opened the drawer beneath the dresser and fumbled about amongst her scanty store of knives and spoons.

'It's the picture of you I'm looking for, the same that was took at the school the time the inspector came round and the other gentleman with him.'

Some months ago a school inspector had visited Innishbofin. He brought with him an English friend who wished to visit the wilder and less civilized parts of Ireland. This man brought a camera with him and took photographs wherever he went. He intended when he went home to publish an account of his journey. The photographs would adorn the book. The school at the end of Tramore strand struck him as highly picturesque and characteristic of 'A Lost Land', the title of the unwritten book. He made pictures of the children in groups, barefooted all of them, the boys in tattered jackets, the girls in scanty and equally tattered frocks. Then, since Maureen was the prettiest and far the most ragged of the girls, he took a special photograph of her, standing alone with a small kitten in her arms. Being a man of very kind heart, he had a number of copies of these photographs made and sent to the schoolmaster for distribution. Maureen's portrait became a treasured possession to her mother.

'I was thinking,' said Bridget, still fumbling, 'that it

might be good to send it to the young lady, so as she'd know what sort of a girleen you are.'

'It's in the white jug,' said Maureen, 'and not in the drawer at all. But I don't know would I be sending it. I'd be better pleased if I had my good dress on and a pair of stockings.'

Bridget took the photograph from the jug and laid it on the table.

'Let you be said by me,' she said, 'and send it the way it is. When the young lady sees you the way you are she'll know that you'd be the better of a new dress and it's likely she'll send one.'

Maureen, to whom the idea of a new dress appealed strongly, saw the wisdom of her mother's advice. Under the photograph she printed the word ME and slipped it into the envelope, along with the group of the children of Innishbofin school.

V

Thaddaeus Phelim completed his journey eastward along the strand more quickly than his daughter had made hers westward earlier in the evening. She had dawdled as children always do when returning home, for it is not only on the way to school that, like snails, they 'creep unwillingly'. And she had been delayed by the salvaging of the bottle. There was nothing to delay Thaddaeus. His legs were longer than hers and he was eager to show Maureen's mysterious find to the school-master. He was excited by it, hoping, almost believing, that it was some secret communication. As he walked he recited to himself Mangan's appeal to the Dark Rosa-leen, that poetic impersonation of Ireland.

He said aloud:

'Thy holy delicate white hands,
Shall girdle me with steel.'

He hoped for some such ceremony, yearned for it. Then, when the battle was joined:

'The Erne shall run red
With redundance of blood.'

He had no very clear idea where the Erne was, or why it should be the scene of Ireland's Armageddon, but the thought of the flowing blood filled him with exultation. Nor did he greatly care whether it was his own blood or that of some descendant of Oliver Cromwell. That blood should redden the stream of the Erne was the great thing. He shouted the lines when he came to them, and when a man is shouting a battle cry he is inclined to walk fast. Also the gale, threatened early in the afternoon, was gathering force. Before he reached the village he was being blown along—a pleasant way of travelling, for it does not render the walker breathless. With a strong wind behind, it is easy to shout, even to make a loud chant out of the verse of a poet as musical as Mangan.

He found Michael McCarthy engaged, as a good master should be after school hours, in correcting the exercises of his pupils. He was a young man, dark complexioned, black haired, with deep set dark eyes, the eyes of a dreamer and an enthusiast. He was also a man with a grievance against fate which controls the destinies of us all, and a deep anger against those men of official position who act as the executive officers of the decrees of fate. He felt that he ought to be holding a position of far more honour and influence than that of schoolmaster in a small village on a remote island. If things were better ordered, if Ireland was indeed an independent Republic, if the last vestiges of English influence—that north-eastern Ulster corner, for instance—were removed, if Germany were to win the present war, then Michael McCarthy would step forward in the sunlight of his country's new glory.

Life for him was made no more cheerful by the resistance of his pupils to his teaching. There, in front of him, in the exercise book he was correcting, was evidence of the failure of his efforts to impart his own enthusiasm to the children. He had set Patrick Sarsfield as a subject for composition. For an hour he had lectured with fiery eloquence on the career of this picturesque cavalry leader. No single child showed any sign of having understood.

A few had grasped the dry facts of Sarsfield's life. A few more had mixed him up with Parnell. Others thought of him as one of the half-mythical heroes of antiquity. None of them appeared to care whether he had ever fought or not. Michael McCarthy sighed and occasionally cursed.

So Thaddaeus found him.

'Michael,' he said, 'there's a mighty queer thing after happening, and I'd be glad if you'd tell me what you think of it, you that's a man of education and learning more than the most of us.'

That was very much Michael McCarthy's opinion of himself. He was glad to hear that Thaddaeus Phelim thought as he did. He was quite ready to give judgement and advice on the 'mighty queer thing'. He pushed aside the pile of exercises on Patrick Sarsfield and sat attentive.

'There's a letter after coming to Maureen.'

That seemed unimportant, though unusual. Not many letters come to Inishbofin, and letters to little girls there are very rare.

'Who'd be writing a letter to the like of her?' said Michael, no longer much interested.

'I'm not mighty sure that it is for her,' said Thaddaeus, 'though it was her that found it.'

To Michael this seemed a disappointingly simple affair.

'If so be she found a letter,' he said, 'she'd better be giving it to the man it belongs to. Either that or take it back to the post office.'

'How can she give it to any man?' said Thaddaeus, 'when there's no name nor address on it? I wouldn't be of opinion that the post office has any more right to it than Maureen, or me, or yourself, Michael. There's no stamp on it and it wasn't through the post it came. It was out of the sea she took it.'

'Have sense, Thady. If it was a fish she took out of the sea that might be right enough, but letters don't come out of the sea.'

'That's what she told me, anyway.'

'Then she told you lies,' said Michael. 'And it's not the first time that same little lady has done the like. I've caught her at it before. It's too fond of lies she is.'

This was unjust to Maureen who was as truthful as any child ever is. But her appreciation of Patrick Sarsfield had been particularly unsatisfactory. There was that excuse for accusing her of other crimes..

'It was out of the sea she took it,' said Thaddaeus. 'There's no lie about that. In a bottle it was and a cork in it, and sealing wax on top of the cork. You'd think that whoever it was that put it into the sea was mighty particular that it wouldn't get wet.'

Michael's interest was awakened again. Corked and sealed bottles are not often washed up on the shores of Innishbofin, and if the bottle contained a letter it was certainly worth while learning all that could be learned about it. Bit by bit, by way of question and answer, the story of Maureen's find was told. The 'queerness' of the whole affair was duly emphasized by Thaddaeus, and his friend the schoolmaster agreed that it was very queer indeed.

'Thinking you might be able to be giving judgement on it,' said Thaddaeus, 'I brought the letter with me so as you would be able to read it, if that was pleasing to you.'

It was very pleasing to Michael, whose curiosity was thoroughly aroused. He took the letter from Thaddaeus, read it and re-read it with more attention than he had given to any of his pupils' compositions.

'Seemingly,' said Thaddaeus, 'it was a little girlreen that wrote it. That's what it says, anyway.'

'It was no little girl wrote that,' said Michael. 'There is no man in Ireland knows more than myself about the nature of girlreens or the nature of boys either. And I tell you this. It wasn't a girl, big or little, wrote that letter. Look at that!' he pointed to the opening words of Elsie's letter: 'To whomsoever finds this letter.'

'Is there a girl in Ireland or any other place,' said

Michael, 'would write a word like "whomsoever" ? Look at them !' He pushed the pile of Patrick Sarsfield compositions across the table to Thaddaeus. 'Will you find "whomsoever" there ? Or any other word like it ? Believe you me, Thady, him that wrote that was a man of learning—it might be a lawyer or such, one that's accustomed to such words and finds his pleasure in writing them. I'm an educated man myself——'

'You are that, Michael. Devil the man ever I met that's more so.'

Michael acknowledged this tribute without surprise. He was accustomed to be regarded as a man of learning by the people of Innishbofin.

'But it's not a word I'd use, unless I'd been considering it before.'

'And who do you think wrote it ?' said Thaddaeus.

'I've my own opinion about that. But before I say another word I'd like to know where it came from.'

'Out of the sea,' said Thaddaeus, 'so Maureen was telling me and I don't know where she could have got it if it wasn't out of the sea.'

'And how did it get into the sea ? That's what I'm asking you.'

'Seeing as how the answer is to be sent to America, I'd be thinking that it was America it came from.'

'America ! It would fail any bottle to get here from America. How could it ?'

'I was thinking that myself. But Maureen said it might have been brought by the gulf-stream, whatever that may be. But sure you know all about it, seeing it was you taught Maureen. Devil the thing she'd know about that stream or any other only what you taught her.'

Michael McCarthy had mentioned the gulf-stream from time to time in the course of his nature study lessons. Its existence accounted for the fact that fuchsias flourished in Innishbofin, even forming hedges, and that the *osmunda regalis* grew to great heights beside sheltered streams. He

did not know much else about the stream, but felt fairly certain that it would not carry a floating bottle from New York to the west coast of Connaught.

'It was not the gulf-stream,' he said, 'for the gulf-stream couldn't do the like. It's not from America it came, any more than it's a girlie that wrote it. It was nearer hand than what America is that it was put into the sea. It's my opinion that it was one of them submarines put it into the sea the way we'd know they was here and would be ready to help them if they were short of a drop of milk or a few eggs.'

'It might be that way,' said Michael doubtfully, 'and no one would be better pleased than me to give the poor fellows what they wanted. But wouldn't it have been better to have said so plain instead of writing about birthday presents and the like?'

'How could they speak plain with the English rampaging about the seven seas? It would be as much as their lives would be worth if they were to let the English know what they were doing.'

This was intelligible, even plain common sense. The English themselves, a most courageous nation, conceal as far as possible the fact that they have any plans, and admit 'reasons of security' as a legitimate excuse for not announcing that a fresh kind of cap has been devised for some of the women in uniform.

'And what would be the meaning of it?' said Thaddaeus, 'supposing that it was out of a submarine that it came, and it's my opinion that you're right there, Michael.'

The schoolmaster knew no more than Thaddaeus himself what the letter meant. On his theory of its origin, as a message from a German submarine, it had no meaning at all that he could devise or guess. But he was unwilling to admit this. He had a reputation to sustain. It would never do for a man of great learning and the leader of an underground revolutionary party to confess that he could not understand a code message from a friendly power.

Michael took refuge where many a man in a similar position has found it.

He shook his head gravely.

'It wouldn't be right,' he said, 'to be saying plain out what that letter means. I wouldn't doubt you, Thady, that you'd keep your mouth shut; but there's others that might not, and if I was to tell you I'd have to be telling all, which would be as good as telling the English and them fellows up in Belfast, which is what ought not to be done in the interests of the Irish nation. You see that, Thady.'

Thady saw that, as many eager enquirers have seen the force of the same argument. But Thady was dissatisfied, just like those who ask questions at Westminster and receive similar answers.

'But I'll say this much,' said Michael, 'there's a promise in the letter. A birthday present it's called. Well that means something more or less, something that's coming to us, and something mighty useful to men like ourselves. It might be Bren guns or it might be aeroplanes, but it'll be something the English won't like.'

Thaddaeus was not completely satisfied, but was greatly cheered. With the help of such a birthday present, guns or aeroplanes, it was quite likely that before long the Erne would really 'run red with redundancy of blood.'

'Would you be in favour of sending an answer to the letter,' he said, 'just telling them that we'll be ready any time?'

'Have you no sense, Thady? How could we be sending an answer, even if we were wanting to? Is it likely now that the gulf-stream would be carrying a letter out to a German submarine? If that same gulf-stream couldn't bring Maureen's bottle from New York, which it couldn't, how would it be doing what you'd be asking of it? Likely as not it would be an English ship that would get the bottle, if it was in a bottle that you posted your letter, and where would we be then?'

‘ If we don’t send an answer,’ said Thaddaeus, ‘ what will we be doing ? ’

‘ We’ll be waiting. Waiting for what will come to us out of the sea, and when it comes——’

Here Michael paused, as was wise. He knew that his friend’s vivid and romantic imagination would fill in the missing words.

PART IV

NEW YORK

I

THE HOSPITABLE reception of Van Rennan in London bore fruit, and Englishmen in the Foreign Office congratulated themselves, quietly and without ostentation, on their sagacity. It was not a matter of vital importance, but it was something that an influential member of the Republican party should return to his own country firmly attached to the cause of England. There was a good deal that a man like Van Rennan could do. He was rich. He was respected, as men who have acquired great wealth are everywhere, and nowhere more so than in America. He had brains. A man must have high intelligence to keep the affairs of the Eastern Lands Security Investments and those of half a dozen lesser companies flying through the air of the world's Bourses, like glittering balls in a juggler's hands, without ever allowing one to drop. He had also tireless energy and a belief in himself which no set-back could weaken.

Now he had also a great purpose. He was determined to bring America into the war on the side of England. Once, many years before, he had given a large sum to a Women's College as an endowment. By way of reward for his generosity he had been asked to suggest a 'sentiment', motto or slogan which should serve as an inspiration to the students. He gave them this :

Pep without purpose is piffle.

The lady latinist of the institution translated it into a more dignified tongue, giving as her rendering :

Vis sine virtute vana.

She had expressed Van Rennan's meaning and preserved

his alliteration, but it was generally felt that the latin lacked the drive of the original American.

Van Rennan had a 'purpose' after his return from England, and to achieve it would need all his wealth, his brains, and the 'pep' with which nature had abundantly endowed him.

It was scarcely possible, certainly would have been useless, to denounce openly the isolationist policy to which his party was, in those early days, committed. Van Rennan had to go to work cunningly, but he did go to work. Whispers went round from mouth to ear among those who, being connected with 'big business', hated the President heartily and were, therefore, isolationists. Whispers went round among these men. No one knew where they started or how they gained credence. They all tended to suggest that the President, though wrong in every other way, might be right in his foreign policy, right from a purely selfish regard for American interests. Passionate 'America first' orators from the Middle West found their speeches blanketed in a way they could not understand. Terrifically explosive slogans—patriotism of flaming intensity—turned out, to their amazement, to be little better than soap bubbles. It was not apparent that Van Rennan had anything to do with this curious failure of hitherto omnipotent eloquence. Even the orators themselves did not understand what was happening and why a great democracy failed to respond to what, by all the rules of the game, ought to excite to enthusiasm a great democracy.

It will easily be seen that at this time Van Rennan was a very busy man, and, in the eyes of his London friends, an ally worth having.

His wife, Ruth Van Rennan, was eagerly devoted to the cause of England. But her activities were of a different kind. Her husband worked underground, not appearing to work at all. Her activities were well advertised. Her enthusiasm for England began from the day she received Elsie Elton into her care. It would,

no doubt, have developed naturally from the presence in the house of a helpless English child snatched from the horrors of battered London. That was the sort of thing which made a strong emotional appeal. But her devotion to England was also strongly stimulated by her husband. That was part of his work, and he knew the value of his wife to the cause he had at heart.

The Van Rennans inhabited and owned, as their New York home, one of the great houses in the East Sixties, a house in which only a rich woman could and only a fashionable would have wished to live. No one had ever made better use of her opportunities than Ruth Van Rennan. She enjoyed publicity, and, as a fashionable hostess, she got plenty of it in the days before the war. Her house in the East Sixties had long been a centre of fashionable life. Her parties, though never eccentric enough to be vulgar, were original enough to attract the attention of writers of paragraphs. It came to be a mark of social distinction to be found in the lists of Mrs. Van Rennan's guests. Her invitations were sought after and never refused. Like the rain which falls impartially on the just and unjust, the invitations were scattered among men of different parties, and included the editors, with their wives, of important papers. Ruth Van Rennan thoroughly enjoyed the position of fashionable hostess.

In the second year of the war the atmosphere of the house changed in form though scarcely in spirit. It was no longer a centre of merely fashionable life. It became the home of every kind of wartime philanthropy, though it was observed Germany had no share in the generous well-doing. One room after another was given over to committees. There was scarcely an hour of the day—a reasonable hour—at which a committee was not sitting and discussing something, in the Van Rennan house. The members of the committees were women. A man was very rarely present. It was understood that men are or ought to be occupied in other, perhaps less important, certainly less spectacular, affairs. Indeed the

only men to be seen were newspaper reporters and press photographers. These feasted richly on fashionable names, well-known faces and expensive clothes. There was always space in the papers for the names, for the pictures of the faces and detailed descriptions of the clothes. There was even room, occasionally, for brief notes on the plans of one or other of the committees. But these were naturally and rightly regarded as of small interest to the general public. Now and then something spectacular was suggested, approved and undertaken which deserved publicity—as, for instance, the scheme for building a hundred ships designed to bring all London children under the age of ten years to a nursery settlement in Atlantic City. Apart from such rather rare evidence of great exuberance, the work of the various committees was little noticed by the newspapers.

But the work went on. Ruth Van Rennan, a woman of immense vitality, was chairman of all the committees, and fitted all day long from one to another, paying special attention to those whose enthusiasm seemed to be slackening. It was often wondered, by those who knew her best, how she was able to keep so many affairs clear in her head and how she managed to smooth so many ruffled tempers.

The great ballroom, which in peaceful days had been the scene of many sumptuous festivities, was occupied by the packers of Bundles for Britain. Ruth Van Rennan was to be found there during the short intervals between her committee meetings. She knew, as if by instinct, what ought to go into each bundle. Difficult questions about the proportion of babies' shoes to men's pyjamas to be packed were submitted to her by anxious workers and instantly solved. She had plans for securing uniformity of weight and size in bundles made up of the most diverse garments. Behind a screen in a corner of the ballroom she had established two young women in very becoming nurse's costumes ready at any moment to give first aid to delicate fingers chafed by much handling

of coarse string. It was understood that they had at hand bottles of *sal volatile* in case anyone collapsed from over-work. Fortunately no one ever did.

It will easily be understood that Ruth Van Rennan enjoyed herself immensely and was happier than she had been even in the days of her most expensive hospitality. Elsie Elton, the refugee guest, enjoyed her life even more, perhaps, than her hostess did. The perpetual fuss and the crowded activities made the house a paradise to the little girl. She was deliriously happy.

Ever since her arrival she had been petted, dressed in continually changing garments, and delightfully fed, largely on sweets which Ruth Van Rennan taught her to call candies. The petting, which was a little overdone, became tiresome after a time, though very pleasant at first. She had experienced very little of it with her Nannie at home. The clothes were a continual joy, as new clothes are and ought to be to a little girl. The candies were a delight, as they should be to any child healthy enough to gorge without pain afterwards. Her education, for Ruth Van Rennan was a conscientious woman, hardly troubled the child. It was conducted by experts who taught all sorts of things from violin playing to civics, and who had all been warned never to overtire the child. They were particularly careful about this, realizing the advantage of never overtiring themselves.

When the philanthropic efforts reached boiling point, Elsie's education was almost entirely neglected. The experts still came to the house at their appointed hours, but if the child showed any disinclination for their ministrations they went away again, well satisfied. She was free to wander from room to room, and found special pleasure among the Bundles for Britain in the ballroom. Here she became the pet of a hundred women who felt that they owed all the affection they could give to a poor little refugee who had endured nameless horrors in bombed London. They found her an attractive child, and it was agreed that she was 'the cutest little thing ever

seen'. Elsie, anxious to please, tried to be as 'cute' as she could, but unfortunately attached a different meaning to the word and, in her efforts to show English cuteness, rather spoiled, though not to any serious extent, her reputation for cuteness as understood by American ladies.

It was on an afternoon in December that Ruth Van Rennan, having deserted a committee, entered the ball-room and found Elsie absorbed in the packing of men's striped cotton trousers. The stripes were of the gayest possible colours. Elsie had never seen anything like them worn in England. She wondered whether a pair might fall to Sir Aylmer, and what he would look like if he wore them. Ruth kissed her hurriedly. She had not seen her before that day. Life was too hectic at the moment for regular goodmorning greetings.

'There's a letter for you, honey,' she said. 'Wouldn't you like to go and get it? I sent it up to your room.'

Elsie was not very eager to get her letter. She preferred to take part in the packing of the striped trousers, which she had already learned from her American friends to call pants.

'Oh thank you, Auntie Ruth,' she said. 'I think I'm being useful here, and every one ought to be useful in wartime, oughtn't they? You said so when you were giving that lecture to the Women's Home Warrior Sodality.'

Bright red and blue stripes are attractive, and packing is pleasant work when done in moderation. It was not likely that Elsie was moved by a pure desire to be useful when she said she preferred to stay where she was. Under ordinary circumstances the arrival of a letter is an exciting event for a child of nine, but Elsie's only regular correspondent was her father, and Sir Aylmer, though an affectionate parent, was a very busy man. He wrote regularly once every week, but the contents of his letters did not vary much. Elsie knew fairly well what she would find when she opened the envelope. There would be an assurance that he missed her greatly,

a hope that she was in good health and happy, a mildly expressed exhortation to be good, and a slight mention of the bombs which still fell on London. No one, not even a very dutiful daughter, would rush away from an agreeable occupation to get a letter which, like the printed report of a charitable society, might very well be taken as read.

But to all delight—the Psalmist goes further and says to all things—there comes an end. The last pair of ‘pants’ was placed securely in its bundle and the next pile of garments to be dealt with looked dull. Ruth, who was still with the packers, suggested that a letter, which was sure to be from her father, ought to be more eagerly welcomed. Then, by way of speeding her departure, kissed Elsie again. Two of the packers also gave kisses. There were three more who intended to, but Elsie fled. She did not like kisses which, she said, were damp things, and she particularly disliked those of the ladies who frequented the house in the East Sixties. They left red marks on her cheeks and obliged her to wash her face oftener than she did when left unknissed. Elsie was of the opinion that face washing was right and proper in the morning, perhaps desirable before going to bed, but thoroughly tiresome and vexatious if it had to be repeated often during the day.

She reached her room and saw at once that the letter was not from her father. It was addressed in unfamiliar writing. It bore a pale green stamp which she had never seen before. Her interest was quickened. Here would be none of the familiar enquiries about her health and happiness, no exhortation to be a good girl. She tore open the envelope, scarcely noticing the ‘Examined by the Censor’ which decorated the outside of all her father’s letters but left the contents unharmed. This time it was different. Elsie saw at a single glance, before she began to read, that a large oblong patch had been cut out of the letter. The censor’s examination had not been a mere formality. The man had seen at once that Maureen was

asking for a present or, at least, hinting that she would like to receive one. There are few things more dangerous in war time. The whole course of military operations may be altered to the advantage of Germany if anyone is allowed to ask for a present from America. To the actual reception of a gift there is, of course, no objection. That would be unreasonable. But to ask for it is criminal, a form of high treason. The censor had been rendered more deeply suspicious by Maureen's incautious mention of gold. Financial relations between England and America were critical, and, at the last, all finance goes back to gold. The censor was in duty bound to cut out the whole part of the letter which referred to birthday presents, gold or Bridget's suggestion of a new dress.

The letter as Elsie received it ran :

' I learn about the gulf-stream which is very useful . . . might be better, but I don't know would it.'

The censor had in fact been very doubtful about the reference to the gulf-stream. This might convey information to the commander of submarines, who but for Maureen's letter might never have heard of the gulf-stream. But, though doubtfully, the censor let this through, influenced by the fact that the letter came from Ireland, a neutral country which must be treated very tenderly. Had the gulf-stream or the Sargossa Sea or the Newfoundland Banks been alluded to by any one writing from England, the whole letter would at once have been suppressed.

Elsie, reading her letter as it reached her, was puzzled and exasperated. The Irish at the beginning was entirely unintelligible, as indeed it had been to the censor who had only passed it after receiving from a high authority an assurance that it meant nothing more than ' Oh dear friend '. The gap between the gulf-stream and ' might be better ' opened a wide circle for guessing. What were the missing words? What might be better or worse than a current which warmed the west coast of Europe while Labrador remained icebound? Hours of inter-

esting efforts might be spent in trying to fill in the missing words. Indeed, many hours are thus spent by the recipients of letters mutilated by the censor who may well be regarded as a public benefactor. He has supplied an alternative to cross-word puzzles for intelligent people on both sides of the Atlantic.

But Elsie made no immediate attempt to solve the puzzle. She realized almost at once that the letter was a reply to the one she had dispatched from mid-Atlantic and that it came from another little girl, a piece of luck which she could scarcely have dared to hope for. Her bottle had drifted ashore somewhere, apparently on the west coast of Ireland. This was intensely exciting. More exciting still were the photographs which Maureen enclosed. Elsie had never before seen children like those in the Innishbofin school group, or a little girl so insufficiently clothed as Maureen appeared to be. It would require a gulf-stream of great power to keep fairly warm a little bare-legged girl, with no covering but a scanty and tattered cotton frock. Elsie, conscious of her own abundant and attractive clothes, felt a pity which was almost a sudden affection for the child of the photograph. Here surely was a girl who needed a most generous birthday present, perhaps—this was an inspiration—a Bundle for Britain specially packed for her.

She rushed off to find Ruth Van Rennan. From her she could surely look for sympathy and help. Though absorbed in the delights of her new life in New York, Elsie had not forgotten the letter she had put into the bottle or the promise of a present which the letter contained. It required only the help of Auntie Ruth to enable her to fulfil that promise in the most splendid way. And of that help she felt sure. A lady who was dispatching hundreds of bundles to people of whom she knew nothing, would most certainly set apart a special bundle for a little girl who plainly needed such a thing very badly indeed.

II

It took Elsie a long time to find Mrs. Van Rennan. The house, like all those on the East Sixties, was a large one, containing many rooms on different floors, served by three staircases and two lifts. Mrs. Van Rennan had left the packing-room after she despatched Elsie in search of her letter. There followed for this busy lady a series of visits, brief but purposeful, to different centres of work. She said a few words of encouragement to six ladies who were passing cotton belts through the tops of pyjama trousers. She cleared up the difficulties of a finance committee which was trying to translate dollars into pounds at an uncertain rate of exchange. She soothed a lady in the cutting-out room whose scissors had mysteriously disappeared. She reached at last the room where the Child Nutrition Committee was sitting. Elsie, in pursuit, was passed on from one room to another at an increasing speed.

The vice-chairman of the Child Nutrition Committee vacated her chair at once and asked Mrs. Van Rennan to preside. This was quite the right thing to do, for Mrs. Van Rennan was *ex officio* chairman of all committees. The vice-chairman gave up her seat joyfully. The committee had unfortunately allowed a difference of opinion on a purely technical point to degenerate into a heated discussion, which was fast turning into a number of personal quarrels. It is evidence of Mrs. Van Rennan's ability that before she had presided for five minutes she had picked up the threads of the discussion and isolated the points at issue. It was no simple matter which had ruffled the tempers of these excellent ladies.

How many vitamins can be expected to survive in a dehydrated banana? Do these surviving vitamins, if there are any, belong to Class A, B, C, or D? Is a banana, after dehydration, a suitable food for children under two years of age, who, being English children, had been living for months in underground shelters and there-

fore require some substitute for sunlight introduced into their diet? It is easy to understand how such questions gave rise to vigorous discussion and consequent loss of temper.

When Mrs. Van Rennan took the chair, to the immense relief of her deputy, all the members of the committee were talking at once and talking loudly. American women, unlike Cordelia, have loud voices even when they are in good tempers. When irritable they make a very great deal of noise.

Mrs. Van Rennan's first task was to secure such a measure of silence as to make it possible for her own voice to be heard. This she did in a surprisingly short time. Next, she reduced the committee to some degree of agreement on the subject of the meals of English bombed babies. This was not difficult, for every single woman present was full of kindness, sympathy and a desire to be helpful. The question of the vitamins in the dried bananas was more difficult, but she could certainly have settled that to the satisfaction of every one if she had not been interrupted.

Elsie burst, rather breathlessly, into the room. She had run up and down a great many stairs in her search for Auntie Ruth, and was in no position at first to explain herself. All she could do, while panting, was to put her letter into Mrs. Van Rennan's hand.

She was received by the Committee with smiles and little gurgles of pleasure, for she was a very popular child, and every one who worked in the Van Rennan house not only knew but loved her. While Mrs. Van Rennan was reading the letter Elsie was kissed four times in spite of her efforts to escape. A much less attractive little girl would have been welcomed, for the ladies were heartily tired of bananas and vitamins. Being really nice and friendly people, they had not wished to quarrel with each other and were glad of an interruption which saved them from feuds which might have lasted for years. After all, the English babies were a very long way off and it

might very well be left to their mothers to discuss whether dehydrated bananas are wholesome or not. Here, in their midst, was an English child, driven from her home by a relentless foe. It was impossible to be too kind to her or to display too much sympathy.

Mrs. Van Rennan read the letter carefully and then, perhaps as a way of escape from the task of classifying the vitamins, read it aloud to the committee, thus saving Elsie from a great many other kisses.

'It begins,' she said, 'with some words in a foreign language, one of the Eastern languages, perhaps, quite possibly Yugo-Slav.'

'Or Magyar,' said Mrs. Rochefort, who sat next to the chairman. She could glance at the letter Mrs. Van Rennan held. 'It looks to me like what I've always thought Magyar might be.'

She was firmly and immediately snubbed.

'The Hungarians,' said Mrs. Van Rennan, 'are the people who speak Magyar, and as they are Germany's allies they would not be allowed to write to an English child. Even if their own government did not stop them, the English censor would certainly suppress the letter. The language is certainly not Magyar.'

Mrs. Rochefort, though snubbed, was not reduced to silence.

'It might,' she said, 'be Albanian.'

Mrs. Van Rennan had nothing to say about that suggestion. Nor had anyone else. No one knew—it was, indeed, impossible to know—whether Albania was in alliance with England or Germany, and how correspondence from that country would be dealt with by the censor.

The committee passed on to Bridget Phelim's 'Your Ladyship', supplementary greeting suggested as a beginning for Maureen's letter. This was most exciting. Every one knew that Elsie belonged to the English upper classes, but no one suspected that she was a lady of title. It was generally felt that Mrs. Van Rennan had acted unfairly in suppressing so interesting a fact.

Maureen's statement that she was herself a little girl brought a chorus of sympathetic cries and a suggestion that she should at once be brought to America and there suitably cherished. There were several volunteers for the post of foster mother. Another Elsie would be a most desirable possession.

It was still early in the war, and the burden which English refugee children ultimately became had not yet been felt. When Maureen's photograph was passed round the table the obvious destitution of the child increased the desire to play Providence in succouring her. There was an eager clamour of voices, almost equal in noise to the vitamin discussion. Every one put in a claim for Maureen.

This was interrupted by Elsie who had by this time recovered her breath and was able to speak distinctly.

'Please, Auntie Ruth, may I send her a present? A nice present like the blue and red striped trousers, only, of course, not trousers on account of her being a girl which is what I asked her to tell me and she did.'

But the feminine equivalent of striped trousers seemed to these charitable ladies far too small a gift for the bare-footed child of the photograph. Something more, much more, was required.

'It will be much better to bring her over here,' said Mrs. Leath, one of the ladies who had been most eager to secure this refugee. 'We'll give her all she wants when she arrives.'

'But I promised,' said Elsie. 'In my letter I said I'd send her a birthday present.'

Mrs. Van Rennan had, of course, heard all about the letter in the bottle, one version of the story from Elsie and another from her husband. She felt that she ought to clear up the situation by telling the story to the committee. This resulted in several more attempts to kiss Elsie. The bottle letter was just the 'cutest' thing—the word this time meaning romantic—ever heard of, and Elsie's reputation rose to almost incredible heights.

Refugee, ladyship, and heroine—it was almost as if she had made the voyage in a bottle herself—there was no little girl in the world like her.

‘But, please, Auntie Ruth,’ Elsie persisted, ‘do let me send the present. Her birthday is a long way off, but couldn’t we have a striped dress made in time for Christmas?’

Maureen’s letter had been handed round to be read by each member of the committee in turn. When it reached the bottom of the table, half-way on its round, Miss Rames, who sat there, rose to her feet with an air of great determination. She was the leader of the party opposed to the inclusion of vitamins in the dehydrated bananas. Every one knew her to be a fearless person who held strong opinions and liked to voice them.

‘I beg to propose,’ she said, ‘as a resolution coming from this committee, that the action of the British censor in mutilating this letter shows an open and flagrant contempt for the Munroe Doctrine, and that the President be requested to forward a strong protest to Prime Minister Churchill.’ She glanced at the letter again. ‘I totally fail to understand why the gulf-stream should be regarded as a British possession. I happen to know that it starts somewhere in Mexico. It is therefore not British, and the censor had no right to interfere with it.’

This roused Mrs. Dale, another member of the committee. It was she who, earlier in the afternoon, spoke in favour of the banana vitamins as suitable food for babies in air-raid shelters. She was strongly pro-British in sentiment and argued that although the gulf-stream started in Mexico it went directly by the shortest route to the British Isles, and that an English censor had a perfect right to regard it as legitimate prey.

Mrs. Van Rennan, with her long experience as chairwoman, saw that the meeting was getting out of hand again, and that bad feeling might easily be created by the sudden introduction of international politics into a discussion which ought to be confined to—— Even

Mrs. Van Rennan by this time was not quite sure what the committee was supposed to be discussing. But she was equal to a situation which might very well have baffled the speaker of the House of Commons. She looked round the room with a bright smile, so managed that each lady felt that it was for her, and had a confidential character as if it was for her only. At the same time she put an arm round Elsie, drawing her down on to the arm of the chair which she occupied as presiding lady. No other chair in the room had arms.

'We must not forget darling Elsie,' she said, 'and her most interesting letter. You have all noticed that it not only begins but ends with some words in a foreign language. *Mise le meas mor.*' She pronounced '*mise*' as if it rhymed with '*dies*', which might have puzzled any one who knew Irish. Nobody did, so the mispronunciation did no harm. 'That shows'—she was referring to the fact that the language was not English—'that shows how deeply in need of help this poor child is—of immediate and generous help. In my opinion a bundle, a large bundle, ought to be dispatched at once, addressed to poor little Maureen.'

'Oh thank you, Auntie Ruth,' said Elsie.

'And I suggest that Elsie goes down to the packing-room at once, and asks Mrs. Hegarty, the head of the packing department, to make up a bundle with Elsie's help.'

'Darling Auntie Ruth!' said Elsie. 'That's perfectly lovely of you! And I may do something about the striped trousers, mayn't I? I'm sure they could easily be made into a dress or a coat. And Maureen would love them. My father wouldn't wear them—at least, I don't think he would—so the pair meant for him could be given to Maureen.'

III

Mrs. Van Rennan's troubles were over for the time. So she thought, and had good grounds for thinking. The

ladies of the Children's Nutrition Committee were so much interested in the bundle for Elsie's ill-clad little girl that they all wanted to go down to the packing-room and there give advice on what should be sent. They readily agreed to postpone the settlement of the dehydrated bananas until a later date. To keep the proceedings strictly in order a formal resolution was proposed and seconded: 'That this meeting be adjourned *sine die*.' This would have been carried unanimously if it had not been for Miss Rames, the lady who wanted to have the British censor publicly rebuked by the American President. She was one of those tiresome people who are fond of raising fresh points for discussion just as everything is comfortably settled. This time she wanted to know what *sine die* meant. Mrs. Van Rennan could easily have explained. If the resolution were passed the committee would not meet again until she chose to summon it, and that she would not do until Congress or somebody else had issued an authoritative statement about the number of vitamins in a powdered banana. This would not have satisfied the determined lady, who wanted to go on with the vitamin argument as soon as possible. She was saved by Mrs. Rockefeller, who said that *sine die* was Latin and that Latin words never meant anything at all. She was sure of this because her husband was a lawyer and accustomed to the use of Latin in documents meant to be argued about by judges and others. This satisfied the committee and the resolution was carried by acclamation. There was a short delay for the use of powder and lipstick, very necessary after the prolonged debate. Then the whole party trooped down to the packing-room.

There Mrs. Van Rennan found herself faced with fresh trouble. Elsie was in tears. Mrs. Hegarty, the head of the department, stood beside the child, looking pale but determined.

'Please, Auntie Ruth,' Elsie spoke in a kind of wail, 'she says she won't. Please tell her she must.'

'I can't,' said Mrs. Hegarty firmly.

'She could, she could. But she won't,' said Elsie.

'Can't,' said Mrs. Hegarty, still more firmly. 'To dispatch such a parcel would be to fly in the face of the Constitution.'

It appeared, after a good deal of explanation, that she did not mean the Constitution of the United States, but the rules and regulations which bound Mrs. Van Rennan's branch of the Bundles for Britain organization. She made her point quite clear by saying that the bundle Elsie wanted was to be despatched to Ireland.

'And Ireland,' she said, 'is Eire and therefore not part of Britain.'

'Nonsense,' said Miss Rames who had wanted to sack the censor.

'It's not nonsense,' said Mrs. Hegarty. 'I'm Irish myself and I know.'

She might have added that, being Irish, she heartily detested those of her fellow-countrymen whose politics differed from hers. This was her true reason for refusing to dispatch the bundle. Her professed loyalty to rules and regulations would have been unnatural in any Irish man or woman. It was enough for her that Elsie's bundle, if sent, would have been some small benefit to some one in that part of Ireland which remained neutral, perhaps even hostile to England in the war. She was herself passionately pro-English. Had she known who Thaddaeus Phelim was and what his politics were, she would have been even more violently opposed to sending the bundle.

There was a murmur of assent. It was generally felt that if Elsie's mysterious letter came from Germany, then no bundle of clothes, or anything else, not even a dehydrated banana, ought to be sent in return. And there was to be taken into consideration the strange language at the beginning and end of the letter. It was not German. Several members of the committee were sure of that, having had some lessons in that tongue while at school. But it might be Magyar. The suggestion had

been made, and though Mrs. Van Rennan had brushed it aside, there remained in many minds an uncomfortable suspicion that help might be given to England's enemies without the committee knowing it.

Mrs. Van Rennan had intended to meet the difficulty about the violation of the constitution by the simple expedient of amending the constitution itself, a plan quite in accordance with American practice. She now began to feel a little doubtful about this plan. It really would not do to allow it to be thought that there was any uncertainty about the anti-German feeling of her organization, or any doubt about its wholehearted devotion to the suffering English people.

Mrs. Van Rennan felt it unwise to press for a change in the rules of her organization. Mrs. Hegarty had carried her point when she protested against the sending of clothes to Germans or any one connected with Germany, and the general confusion of thought made every one suspicious. Elsie, too, though she understood very little of what had been said—and in this she was by no means alone—saw that the chance of getting clothes for the little girl on Innishbofin was vanishing.

'Poor, poor Maureen,' she said, and tears were in her eyes again. 'And I promised faithfully that I would send her a present.'

Mrs. Van Rennan grasped at a last chance of defeating the obstinate prejudices of Mrs. Hegarty. She knew that an appeal to the heart of American womanhood is seldom or never made in vain. Reason may point out one way of conduct; but if pity suggest another, it will be pity's way which will be taken. The cause of suffering humanity, specially that of suffering childhood, triumphs over politics, patriotism, hatred of Nazi-ism, or anything else. Mrs. Van Rennan held up the photograph of the Innishbofin children and then pressed into Mrs. Hegarty's hand the picture of Maureen in her skimpy cotton dress. She took Elsie, the well-dressed comfortable Elsie, by the hand as if to exhibit her to the ladies who surrounded her.

'Look!' she said. 'When our children are warm and well fed'—for the moment she had forgotten that Elsie was not her child, was indeed no more than an adopted niece—'we must do something to save that poor little girl from having to face the horrors of an arctic winter in those pitiful rags.'

Every one was moved. One lady, with a sense of the value of compromise, made a suggestion.

'Can't we do it just this once?' she said. 'I mean, make an exception in the case of this poor little girl. We needn't say anything about it to any one and of course will never do it again.'

Miss Rames, who had condemned the British censor, now appeared as a conscientious opponent of any kind of subterfuge.

'Certainly not,' she said. 'Either a thing is right or wrong. If it's right we must do it openly and boldly. If it is wrong we must not do it at all. We're not politicians and must not sink to their levels.'

'Besides,' said Mrs. Hegarty, 'the climate of the west of Ireland is not arctic.'

She had forgotten for the moment her suggestion that Maureen was a Hungarian and therefore an open enemy. But she had not forgotten the gulf-stream, though every one else had. She produced it triumphantly.

'The gulf-stream,' she said, 'renders the Irish climate one of the most equable in the world. A cotton frock is the most suitable garment for a girl there, even in the depths of winter.'

So do our careless words produce the most unexpected results. When Michael McCarthy, the schoolmaster in Innishbofin, told a class of inattentive children that the gulf-stream was responsible for the growth of fuchsias on the island, he could not possibly have imagined that the information would be a weapon in the hands of a lady of Ulster descent and more than Ulster prejudice at a meeting of charitable ladies in New York.

'Labrador,' said Mrs. Hegarty, pressing home her

point, 'though in the same latitude, is different. The winter there is cold.'

'If Mrs. Hegarty thinks we ought to send parcels to Labrador'—the voice came from a lady at the back of the room—'of course we will. But my husband says that Labrador has never been bombed.'

What can have induced her husband to supply her with this curious information no one will ever know. But her words supplied Mrs. Van Rennan with a way of escape from a situation which was becoming every minute more difficult. The introduction of Labrador into a discussion already confused convinced her that she could no longer hope to control her ladies or to arrive at a decision which would command assent.

'I think,' she said, 'that I should like to consult my husband, not only about the legality of any action we may take, but about its possible political reverberations. With the presidential election at hand——'

'Oh do,' said Elsie. 'I'm sure Uncle Bled will let me send the parcel. He quite approved of me putting the letter in the bottle. In fact, he helped me.'

American ladies of independent spirit are no fonder of consulting their husbands than are their sisters in other parts of the world; but husbands have their uses. They are often the providers of money for charitable and other purposes. They can also be used as courts of appeal and can be made responsible for any unpleasantness which may follow the course their wives mean to take.

It was generally agreed—even Mrs. Hegarty consenting—that Mr. Van Rennan should be consulted.

IV

Mrs. Van Rennan, as has appeared, was a woman of great organizing ability, some strength of character and a very kind heart. She was also—and this is, perhaps, a rarer thing—a wife who understood the art of managing husbands. Bledsom Van Rennan was a busy and active man, greatly occupied both in business and political

affairs. Every hour of his working day was filled, partly owing to the number of things he had to do, but chiefly owing to the curious fact that life—business life—moves much more slowly in America than it does in England. An Englishman, engaged as Mr. Van Rennan was, could have got through his day's work and had time for a game of golf afterwards. Mr. Van Rennan never had a moment to spare. On the other hand, being a man of immense energy, he was never tired at the end of the day as Englishmen often are. When he came home in the evening he was always ready to listen to what his wife had to tell him about her affairs.

An English bishop, a very wise man, has noted this as one of the secrets of a happy married life. Giving advice to a young husband, he said: 'Do not work so hard that you are too tired to be nice to your wife when you come home. Do not be like the schoolboy of whom his master reported that he was working so hard he had not time to stroke the cat.' Whether the lady liked this description of her position in the household is not revealed, but there is no doubt about the wisdom of the advice.

Mr. Van Rennan had never met that English bishop. He had never even heard of him, but he would have approved of the advice. He was never too tired to stroke his cat, if Ruth Van Rennan had wished for such treatment. She did not. But she recognized that it was wise to give her husband time to recover from a day's work which might have tired another man, before asking for any advice or help she wanted, before even trying to interest him in what she had been doing all day.

Thus it was not till after dinner that she opened the matter of the letter and the bundle for southern Ireland. Elsie was always allowed to share the evening meal, and this she regarded as a privilege. At home, under the rule of her Nannie, she was on her way to bed before her father dined—which, indeed, he usually did at the Minerva Club, in which no little girl would have been allowed to set foot.

Mrs. Van Rennan, knowing the eager excitement of the child, warned her beforehand not to say anything about Maureen or Innishbofin until dinner was over. Elsie was obedient, or intended to be, but she could not manage to keep away from the subject altogether.

'Uncle Bled,' she said, half-way through dinner, 'do you know anything about the gulf-stream?'

Mr. Van Rennan knew all that is generally known about the gulf-stream. He had never made a special study of ocean currents, but he was a man of wide general knowledge who had often crossed the Atlantic. It is hardly possible to do that without coming in touch with the gulf-stream. It is responsible for many things, among others, the fogs off the Newfoundland Banks. Mr. Van Rennan always asked questions, a habit which went far to account for his wide store of information. He invariably questioned ships' officers about fogs, spells of cold weather and returning warmth. He was always referred to the gulf-stream, and so felt that he could speak of it with some confidence.

'The gulf-stream,' he said, 'is a current which flows in a north-easterly direction, taking its origin _____'

Here Mrs. Van Rennan frowned heavily at Elsie, who realized that she was doing something wrong.

'I am so sorry, Uncle Bled,' she said. 'I ought not to have asked you that.'

Mr. Van Rennan looked at her with some curiosity. Her apology seemed to him wholly unnecessary. There was no unpleasant secret in his past life in any way connected with the gulf-stream. He had neither made money nor lost it over any part of the Atlantic Ocean. There was no reason for Elsie's apology, though it seemed odd that there should be a thirst for this kind of knowledge in a little girl who had never before shown any special interest in geography. Then he glanced at his wife and caught on her face the remains of the frown of warning. He was a quick-witted man and saw at once there was

something he had not grasped behind this question about the gulf-stream. He ventured a guess.

'I reckon,' he said, 'that you're beginning to wonder whether the gulf-stream could have carried that bottle of yours to land anywhere.'

'Oh no,' said Elsie, watching Mrs. Van Rennan's face for a further sign. 'I wasn't wondering that at all.'

This was true. There was no need for wonder. She knew that her bottle had come to shore and suspected it was the gulf-stream that had taken it there.

'Perhaps you know,' said Van Rennan, guessing again.

'Yes, I do. But Auntie Ruth didn't want me to tell you till after dinner. She thought you'd rather hear about it then.'

'You'd better tell him now,' said Mrs. Van Rennan. 'When you've gone so far there's no use keeping the news any longer.'

'Are you sure you won't mind, Uncle Bled? I mean to say, you've had a good deal of your dinner, though not your pudding yet.'

Elsie had been some time in America, but had not yet learnt to call pudding desert, a word which had a different meaning for her.

'But perhaps,' she said, 'it may not be a very good pudding. I mean one which you don't like awfully and then you won't mind my interrupting it, though I know Auntie Ruth told me not to.'

'The fact is,' said Mrs. Van Rennan, 'that Elsie got an answer to that letter of hers.'

'From a little girl,' said Elsie, 'a dear little girl about my own age, though a little older, being twelve, while I'm nine. Still, she's not actually grown-up, though old enough to write a lovely letter.'

'The letter was so cut up by the censor,' said Mrs. Van Rennan, 'that it was very hard to make out what it meant.'

'That's Wallaby again, I suppose,' said Mr. Van Rennan. 'I always knew that man was a fool.'

Mrs. Van Rennan had not heard of Colonel Wallaby before. She closed her eyes with a look of exasperated weariness on her face.

'Please, Bledsom,' she said, 'don't introduce any more complications. I've had a tiring afternoon. What between the Magyar language, the gulf-stream, the proper punishment for the English censor, the difference between Eire and plain Ireland, vitamins and bananas—everything has got so mixed up that I scarcely know where I am. And now you drag in some one called Wallaby. Who is Wallaby?'

'Wallaby is a man who wouldn't play the right card in a doubled no-trump hand unless he had no other card left in his hand, and he'd hesitate about playing it even then.'

'Auntie Ruth's ladies,' said Maureen, 'said I couldn't send a Bundle for Britain to the little girl who's called Maureen, unless you said I might, but you will say I may, won't you, Uncle Bled?'

'They seem to think,' said Mrs. Van Rennan, 'that the answer to Elsie's bottle letter came from Hungary, which is an enemy country, so we oughtn't to send a bundle there.'

'There's no sea anywhere near Hungary,' said Mr. Van Rennan. 'So if those ladies of yours say the bottle drifted ashore there they are just plain dumb.'

'Oh, not dumb, Uncle Bled,' said Elsie who had not yet learned the American language. Dumb meant speechless to her, and the one thing clear in her mind was that the ladies in the packing-room could talk.

'Seems to me,' said Mr. Van Rennan, 'that I might clear things up a bit if I saw the letter. Have you got it with you, Ruth?'

Mrs. Van Rennan opened the small, elaborately embroidered bag which she used in the evening. She took out Maureen's letter and the two photographs. He read the letter first.

'Wallaby,' he said, 'has gone the limit when he cut

up a child's letter like this. But what can you expect of a man who plays a club when any heart would have got the other fellows four hundred down ?'

'Oh, Uncle Bled, how splendid !' said Elsie. 'So I may send a Bundle for Britain to poor little Maureen ? I always knew you'd let me.'

Mr. Van Rennan was looking at the photographs.

'I'd sure say,' he said, 'that this girl is in want of a few clothes. A new dress, Elsie, and a winter coat.'

'Oh, thank you, Uncle Bled. I'd thought of the dress, a striped one like the trousers we send to the men. But I quite forgot about a coat.'

'I don't think we can send them without breaking the law,' said Mr. Van Rennan. 'You see she has practically asked for a birthday present, and it is illegal to send the smallest thing to any one who asks for it, though you may if they don't. Seems silly to me. But in my position, as head of an important organization, I must be careful about the law.'

'In England,' said Mr. Van Rennan, 'you can't so much as blow your nose without breaking some law.'

'Oh, but I often have,' said Elsie, making a laudable effort to stand up for her native land.

'If you did,' said Mr. Van Rennan, 'you might have gone to jail for it. I've read the regulation myself. Only that I'm an American citizen I should have been prosecuted. Here you are. I learned the darned thing off by heart. "Section 4, Paragraph P 2 of the Regulation of Clothing Order. No garment, other than those used for the protection against cold, or in the case of wet weather for the securing of moderate inhumidity, may be brought into use other than as may be regarded as necessary or desirable for the purpose of the war effort as described in Section 2, Paragraph B 15. Note A. Pocket handkerchiefs are to be regarded as garments within the meaning of the Regulation." What do you make of that, Elsie ? If it doesn't mean you go to jail for blowing your nose I don't know what it does mean.'

'I don't want to go to jail,' said Mrs. Van Rennan, 'and I must keep the records of the Bundles for Britain Society above suspicion.'

'If you feel that way about it, Ruth, you'd better leave the whole thing in my hands. I'll send a cheque for—for—shall we say two hundred and fifty dollars, Elsie? That will buy your little friend a complete rig-out, from shoes to an imitation pearl necklace.'

'Oh, Uncle Bled, she will be pleased! That's better than any bundle.'

'And if Wallaby interferes with my letter,' said Mr. Van Rennan, 'I'll have him bumped off next time he comes to America. A man who'd lead a club in a doubled no-trump hand when I had complete command of the hearts is a man that the world can perfectly well do without.'

'Then I hope,' said Mrs. Van Rennan, 'that he won't come back here. I don't want you to turn gangster, Bledsom.'

'Oh, he'll come back all right. All the little tin God Almighty's in England are continually coming over here. It's their idea of a pleasant holiday, taken free at their government's expense.'

'But isn't sending money just as illegal as sending a bundle?'

'It may be. Likely is. But the way I send it the law won't matter. What I mean to do is to send a cheque to your father, Elsie, and tell him to pass on the value in sterling to your little friend. I guess a man in the position of your father, Sir Aylmer, a member of the government and all that, can get away with it every time he wants to break any footy little law.'

Here Mr. Van Rennan made at least one mistake, perhaps two. Sir Aylmer was not, technically, a member of the government, though in fact he was one who governs far more really than any cabinet minister. And he did not realize that the British Civil Service is not only entirely incorruptible, but devotedly loyal to all laws, a

thing which seems natural enough to every one who understands that it is the Civil Service which makes the laws, a job which parliament has been glad to hand over to any one willing to undertake it. There was only one possibility of law breaking by an English civil servant, and Mr. Van Rennan may have been reckoning on that. Every member of the great service is likely to know the laws made by the department to which he belongs, but he may not know all even of these. Several hundreds were probably made while he was absent from the office on his fortnight's annual leave. It is hard for him to learn them. The laws made by other departments of other Ministries he can only learn by breaking them and being prosecuted, just like any ordinary man. This makes him careful to do nothing at all. Only in that way is he safe. But occasionally he does break a law, though always unconsciously.

PART V

LONDON

I

IT WOULD be unfair to call Madeline Crow ambitious. If she was a diligent and careful worker it was not in the hope of attaining honour or exalted position. All she wanted was a slightly larger salary and such promotion as would entitle her to a seat a little nearer the fire in the large, cold room in which she worked. The chair nearest the fire belonged by right to Mrs. Halliday, the head of the B 4 T section of the Censor's Office. Near her, and therefore near the fire, sat the senior members of the staff. Further off in a chilly and draughty place poor Madeline Crow shivered all day at her work. It was in the hope of a higher salary, but chiefly in the desire for a warmer seat, that Madeline did her very dull work steadily and well. But promotion comes very slowly, if it comes at all, in Censorship Offices, and mere hard work seldom achieves it. There are many conscientious young women among English war workers. Madeline's virtues did not distinguish her from hundreds of other girls. Her own hope was that some day a chance might come which would bring her under the notice of Mrs. Halliday, perhaps even of the remote and inaccessible Colonel Wallaby who shone high up in the censorship firmament.

With this hope in her she ploughed steadily through piles of quite innocuous letters, always on the alert for anything which might be a code. The best she ever came on was an occasional place-name in the letter of a soldier's mother to her son, and no credit could be got by blacking that out, though Madeline always did it.

Hope dies slowly in the young, and Madeline managed to keep hers alive until at last it justified itself. In the end it did. She came one day on a letter which struck

her as very unusual. It was addressed to an American in New York, called Van Rennan. It was written from the Minerva Club and signed 'Aylmer Elton'. Neither the name of the writer nor the address meant anything to Madeline. She had lived all her life with a widowed mother in a remote Devonshire village. The outbreak of war moved her, as it did many other young women, to patriotic effort. Through the help of an uncle she obtained a post in the Censor's Office at a salary which seemed large in her native village, but turned out to be pitifully small, if not actually insufficient, when she came to live in London.

She could hardly be expected to know anything about Mr. Van Rennan. It was not altogether surprising that she had never heard of Sir Aylmer Elton. Highly placed civil servants do not advertise. They prefer power without notoriety to the notoriety without power enjoyed by their political chiefs. Nor had Madeline ever heard of the Minerva Club, that famous home of the learned and wise. She was, however, a diligent reader of exciting fiction, and 'club' was in her mind inseparably connected with the word 'night' used as an adjective. Night clubs were—she was a nice innocent girl—places where nameless orgies are common. But she knew, having studied the rules of the game she was paid to play, that mere vice is no business of the censor, who pursues higher game and takes no more notice of orgies than a well-bred setter would of a domestic hen.

It was the contents of the envelope, not the address on the outside of it, which sent Madeline's pulses beating rapidly. The day was very chilly. The fire, which warmed nobody but Mrs. Halliday, seemed remoter than ever. Madeline's fingers were numb. Her stockingless legs were mottled blue and yellow. A quickening of her blood circulation gave her an agreeable sensation.

The letter which Madeline read was an acknowledgment of the receipt of two hundred and fifty dollars, which represented something over fifty pounds, though

Madeline was not sure of the rate of exchange. This sounded a very large sum to a girl who was hesitating about buying a new winter coat which would not only cost more than she could afford but would absorb her eighteen remaining coupons.

As a careful student of the rules of censorship, she knew that no money may be sent to America from England. She was not quite sure whether money might cross the Atlantic in the other direction, from America to England. But she had a feeling that all dealings of private citizens in the two countries was, if not forbidden, seriously frowned on. The money apparently came from some one called Elsie, though the name, as written by Sir Aylmer, looked more like Elsis. The money, so the letter said, would be transmitted to some one called Maureen at an address so strange that it could hardly be real. Maureen Phelim, Innishbofin, Eire. Madeline became suspicious. This might very well be a code.

Once her suspicions were aroused, Madeline's duties were plain. She took the letter straight to Mrs. Halliday. Standing beside that lady's chair she felt the glow of the fire but hardly appreciated it. The discovery of a letter in code meant more to her than the warming of numbed fingers. And perhaps, after such a proof of her ability, she might obtain a pleasant place close to the fire.

Mrs. Halliday was older than Madeline and knew a great deal more. The Minerva Club as an address suggested extreme respectability to her. But the mention of the two hundred and fifty dollars interested her. She knew that no money may be sent from England to America. It seemed to her likely that such a ban would be reciprocal and that money must not be sent from America to England. Being a thoroughly loyal woman she believed that it is by the enforcing of such prohibitions that wars are won. This Mrs. Halliday held firmly, though she did not understand why. Perhaps no one does. Finance is a mysterious science. Also Maureen, Phelim, and Innishbofin might, as Madeline

suggested, be code words. They were at all events Irish, quite outrageously Irish. Mrs. Halliday, an intelligent and educated woman, was interested in contemporary politics. She knew that the Eire part of Ireland is steeped in a very undesirable kind of neutrality.

'Thank you, Madeline,' she said. 'You were quite right to bring this letter to me. I hardly feel able to deal with it myself. It is, I think, a matter for submission to R.F.2. They will give a ruling. I shall mention your name in my minute.'

Madeline went back to her seat, warmed all over. Even the mottles on her legs had disappeared, partly no doubt through response to the fire, but chiefly because she felt that a chance of promotion had come her way at last.

Mrs. Halliday, having sent Madeline back to her chilly seat, re-read the letter with some care. She was struck by the mention of Elsie, and the name in Sir Aylmer's handwriting looked much more like Elsie. That suggested something to her. She had once held some shares in the Eastern Lands Security Investments Company. These she had loyally surrendered when the government took over all American investments from English holders. Mrs. Halliday had a vivid recollection of this transaction, for she had lost income and suffered a depreciation of her capital. She remembered also that her husband, a stockbroker and given to using the jargon of his profession, used to speak of her shares in the American Company as Elsie's.

Could it be that some one—this Aylmer Elton, for instance—was holding on to shares with which she had unwillingly parted? Even a member of the Minerva Club might conceivably do a thing like that, receiving dividends, carefully camouflaged, from some friend in America. Such a possibility made the letter even more suspicious.

Mrs. Halliday, pledged to the deepest secrecy and faithful to her pledge, could not take advice on the Elsie question from any one outside the office. But she felt

justified in asking her husband when she got home that evening whether he had ever heard of a man called Van Rennan, to whom the suspicious letter was addressed. Mr. Halliday, as well as being a stockbroker, was an ardent Home Guardsman. He had spent the previous night and all that day repelling a German attack on the city of London, conducted by two companies of the Grenadiers. He was tired and in no mood for casual gossip with his wife. While bolting some unappetizing food (Mrs. Halliday had long before lost her cook), he said briefly that if the man she meant was Bledsom Van Rennan, he was the President of the Eastern Lands Security Investments Company.

This information, though grudgingly given, was enough for Mrs. Halliday. Next morning she made a fresh draft of her minute to R.F.2. Besides mentioning the suspicious points which she and Madeline had noticed, she drew attention to the connexion between Mr. Van Rennan and the Elsis Company.

R.F.2, though a department of great experience, failed to understand Sir Aylmer's letter, but was impressed by the Irish address and the mention of the American company, with Van Rennan as its president. The business struck the R.F.2 authorities as interesting. By the time they had finished with it Madeline's original discovery had acquired the dignity of becoming a file of its own and accumulated an impressive number of notes and minutes.

As a file it made its way upwards until it reached Colonel Wallaby's table, where it lay for three days before he could find time to examine it. Poor Madeline's name was by this time completely submerged in the growing flood of papers. She got neither credit nor promotion and had to spend another winter catching cold after cold. The coupons which might have gone to the buying of a winter coat were wasted on pocket handkerchiefs which became more and more necessary.

Since even censors have some conscience about delaying private correspondence, Colonel Wallaby, after three days,

took up the file and examined its contents. He waded through the comments of his subordinates and duly weighed their opinions, before he came to the letter itself. The name of Van Rennan fixed his attention at once. Bledsom Van Rennan is not a common name, and Colonel Wallaby had good reason to remember it.

It would be most unjust to suggest that Colonel Wallaby, or any other high official, would allow his personal feelings to influence his decision in a matter of national importance. But the name on the outside of the envelope recalled to Colonel Wallaby the insolent American who had criticized his bridge play on the *Ukrania* during his voyage to America. He had forgotten all about Elsie, her letter and her bottle, but he still remembered the lead of the queen of clubs and the unpleasant comments made on it.

As a strictly honourable man, Colonel Wallaby would never have used any document which fell into his hands as an opportunity for private revenge; or allowed himself to be influenced in any way by his recollections of a bygone quarrel. But he approached a letter addressed to Van Rennan in an unfriendly spirit. This was natural, perhaps justifiable. A man who insists that a small heart is a better card to lead than the queen of clubs is likely to be untrustworthy in other matters. The name Elsie he had forgotten. Maureen and especially Phelim struck him as odd. Innishbofin inclined him to think seriously of the code theory, originally suggested by Madeline. He did not really believe in or strongly suspect a code. He was more inclined to fix his attention on the mention of money. There was something very odd about this. Financial dealings with America, other than those of the Treasury itself, if not actually forbidden are strongly discouraged. Two hundred and fifty dollars is a considerable sum even in wartime, when millions are thrown about without a thought. Innishbofin—Colonel Wallaby had no idea where or what Innishbofin might be. But it seemed unlikely that anyone would send forty or

fifty pounds to a place with a name like that for any legitimate purpose. The transaction, whatever it was, had a fishy smell about it. Especially when Mrs. Halliday's interpretation of the name Elsie or Elsis was taken into consideration.

At the same time Colonel Wallaby had to consider the fact that the letter was written by Sir Aylmer Elton. He was a man of unimpeachable reputation, highly placed in our incorruptible civil service, the very last man likely to be mixed up in anything shady. Colonel Wallaby felt the need of caution. After thinking the matter over he made up his mind to ask the advice of his friend Sir Beevor Benton. He could not have chosen a better man. Sir Beevor occupied a high position in the Treasury and knew more about finance than any one not actually engaged in making money on a large scale.

The anaemic and always weary girl who manipulated the office central exchange was set to work to discover the Treasury number and then the extension which led to Sir Beevor. She did her work.

'This is the Censor's Office. Colonel Wallaby speaking. Is Sir Beevor Benton there? Oh, that you, Benton? This is Wallaby. W.A.L.L.A.B.Y.'—he spelt the name out, knowing that Sir Beevor was slightly deaf. 'I'd like a chat with you if you can spare the time. I can't shout it over the 'phone. It's about rather a private matter.'

'My dear Wallaby, nothing I should like more than a long pow-wow with you. But I'm rushed to death. Not a minute free from morn till eve or eve to dewy morn. What about lunch at the Minerva? Must be one o'clock sharp or there'll be nothing left to eat. Beastly lunch nowadays even if we're early. Nothing at all except some foul stew or other if we're five minutes late.'

'I'd rather come round to your office,' said Colonel Wallaby. 'Always a crowd of fellows in the Minerva, and this is really rather a private matter.'

He was aware that Sir Aylmer often lunched at the Minerva. It would be difficult to discuss the letter and the money if, as was quite possible, Sir Aylmer sat down beside him.

'Can't have you in the office,' said Sir Beevor. 'Fellows running in and out all day, like rabbits. Might as well be living in a warren or—or any other place where fellows run in and out. What about the billiard-room in the Minerva? No one ever goes there at lunch time. Every one too damned busy or trying to pretend they are. We would have the place all to ourselves at that hour. We'll have our coffee there, and you can buy me a nip of brandy and a cigar. You'll owe me that much for dragging me off to the billiard-room. Most uncomfortable place in the club.'

With this, though he did not like it, Colonel Wallaby had to be content.

II

The billiard-room in the Minerva Club is unsuitable for a conference, and still more unsuitable for an intimate talk. Any well appointed billiard-room is. There are two billiard-tables in the Minerva room. These, when no games are being played, are draped in pale yellow sheets, which look like the shrouds of enormous corpses, a most depressing sight. Unlit hanging lamps, green shaded and of a very unattractive type, add a feeling of severity to the depressing air of the room. Even a theatre, when empty in the morning, is not a sadder place. To talk in such a room is like making a speech to a non-existent audience in some vast assembly hall. In the billiard-room there are no chairs in which men can sit opposite each other in friendly converse. Instead there are long, green, leather-covered seats, set round the room, raised above the floor level on narrow platforms, very convenient for watching a game when one is in progress, impossible to sit on comfortably or to avoid the sense of having quarrelled with the companion

who shares the bench. Racks of cues, all starkly upright, destroy any hope of cosiness.

It was to this room that Colonel Wallaby and Sir Beevor went after lunching together. Coffee was brought to them. In the hope of dispelling the gloom, Colonel Wallaby ordered two liqueurs, only to be told that, even in that early stage of the war, the club's supply of Benedictine was exhausted. With their coffee-cups held uncomfortably in their hands they sat down side by side. Sir Beevor tried to cross his legs, aiming at some delusion of ease. Owing to the height of the bench he only succeeded in spilling most of his coffee into the saucer.

'I suppose,' said Colonel Wallaby, 'that you know Sir Aylmer Elton?'

'Elton. Of course I know Elton. Everybody knows Elton. He's a member here. Saw him at lunch to-day. Good fellow, Elton. Irish of course, but I wouldn't count that against him. Most of the Irishness has been rubbed off by twenty years in the Home Office. That's where he was before they stuck him into one of these new ministries. Co-ordination, I think. Can't think why they put Elton there. What can a fellow do in a jumped-up Ministry like that? No precedents to go by. Can't be any when the thing has only just come into existence.'

'I don't want to say anything against Elton. As you say, he's a thoroughly decent fellow. But things come under my notice in the Censor's Office. Damned queer things some of them. Things you'd never suspect.'

'Elton been running off the rails? Well, these Irishmen will. You can't be sure of them. Still, I wouldn't have thought it of Elton. Playing about with some other fellow's wife, I suppose.'

'No, no. Nothing of that sort.'

'If it's that,' said Sir Beevor, 'take my advice and leave it alone. After all, Wallaby, you're not censor *morum*. No business of yours whether Elton runs a bit off the rails unless the lady's husband turns nasty. Some of them do. So I'm told.'

'But it's not that.'

'There's a war on, as we are occasionally reminded, and in wartime there is always a certain amount of laxity. Look at the divorce courts. Crowded out, I'm told. Women standing in queues hoping to get rid of their husbands. If you've come on a give-away letter of Elton's, just send it on to the lady it's meant for and say nothing about it.'

'I keep on telling you it's nothing of that sort.'

'Can't be drink in Elton's case. Most temperate fellow. Never knew him look on the wine when it is red, at least not more than a passing glance. No one has ever seen Elton the worse, not even after a gala dinner. And he wouldn't write letters about it if he was at it in private, taking a bottle to bed with him. So if it's not women or wine, what is it?'

'Money,' said Wallaby solemnly.

'No business of ours if he's in debt. Elton's a well-off man, apart from his salary. Married a woman with a pot of money, I believe. She's dead, but Elton has the money. He's not the sort of man who speculates. Knows as well as you or I do that playing the market is a mug's game. So he can't be in debt.'

'I wish to goodness you'd listen to me,' said Colonel Wallaby, who was becoming a little irritated. 'What I'm trying to tell you is that Elton seems to be mixed up in something distinctly shady. A letter of his was passed up to me by a woman in my office, a very intelligent woman—'

'And/or good looking?'

'Damn it all,' said Colonel Wallaby, 'can't you be serious for one moment? She's the wife of a stock-broker.'

'Even stockbrokers have been known to have pretty wives.'

But Sir Beevor, for all the pleasure he found in annoying a serious-minded man like Wallaby, was impressed by the mention of finance. As an official of the Treasury, finance

was his business. Elton might have hit on some new way of dodging the income tax, though that was most unlikely. Or he might be playing games with some foreign exchange. It is impossible to tell what an Irishman will do, and foreign exchanges are tempting things to any one with a taste for speculation, especially if he has a little inside information.

'But, joking apart, Wallaby, let's hear what this lady of yours has to say, and I'd better see the letter if you've brought a copy with you.'

Colonel Wallaby told the story of the discovery of the letter and of Mrs. Halliday's suspicions. He produced, from the 'dispatch box he carried, the whole file which had gradually accumulated round Sir Aylmer's letter. Sir Beevor flicked the papers aside without paying much attention to them until he came to the letter itself. He was accustomed to files, having spent the best years of his life compiling and dealing with them. In his opinion the most meritorious people in the Civil Service were those who lost files. They deserved promotion and honours, but unfortunately there were so many of them that they could not all be suitably rewarded.

At last he came to and read Sir Aylmer's letter, addressed to Van Rennan.

'Ah!' he said. 'Written to an American. Van Rennan. Is that the name? Do you know anything about him?'

'I crossed the Atlantic with him last October, in the *Ukrania*. Gave me the impression of being a conceited, disagreeable fellow.'

'Nothing worse than that?'

'Oh, well . . . I don't know much about him except that he thinks he's the only man in the world who can play bridge.'

'Lots of fellows think that. It doesn't follow that they're all financial crooks.'

'He's damned offensive about it.'

Sir Beevor had himself played bridge with Wallaby,

though he avoided doing so as much as he could. He felt some sympathy with Mr. Van Rennan who had evidently spoken plainly to Wallaby. But as an important servant of the Treasury he had his duty to do. He read the letter again.

'Elsie,' he said thoughtfully. Then he spelt the name aloud. 'E.L.S.I.E. Does that suggest anything to you, Wallaby?'

'It's a girl's name,' said Colonel Wallaby. 'But that woman I spoke about, the wife of the stockbroker, says it's the slang name for some company or corporation.'

'She's quite right about that. Our friend Elton's writing is not particularly clear. That last E in Elsie might well be an S, which gives us Elsis, which is exactly what the Stock Exchange called that company. You know the habit those fellows have of giving nicknames to companies or groups of companies when there is a bit of dealing in the shares? Well, a few years ago, shortly before the war, there was a lot of buying and selling of the stock of the Eastern Lands Security Investment Company, a pretty big American affair. Lots of Englishmen had holdings, drew their dividends, twelve per cent., fifteen per cent. or more, and watched their capital increase in value.'

Colonel Wallaby listened with respect. He had heard something like it from Mrs. Halliday and then it sounded to him like something out of a cross-word puzzle. He could imagine it set as a clue by the ingenious gentleman who daily amuses the readers of *The Times*. 'Girl interested in American Insurance.' Or perhaps, 'Land Girl, Eastern Counties.' He listened now with respect to the same thing said by so great a man as Sir Beevor.

'I seem to have heard of that man Van Rennan before,' said Sir Beevor. 'I've an idea, but I may be wrong. Just wait a minute.' He picked up the telephone and asked to be put through to Mr. Huskinson. 'Wonderful fellow, Huskinson,' he said. 'One of our junior men. Has a perfect craze for tabulating and indexing. Can

put his hand in a moment on almost any piece of information any one wants—— Oh, hullo! That you, Huskinson? This is Benton speaking. Sir Beevor Benton. Be a friend in need and look through those filing cabinets of yours. Who is the President of the Eastern Lands Security Investments Company, Inc.? Yes, Inc. It's an American affair, that's why it calls itself Inc. Sorry to bother you, but I expect you really enjoy playing about with those cross-indexes of yours.'

Two or three minutes later Huskinson, the man of indexes and method, produced the information required.

'Eastern Lands Security Investments Inc. Chairman of the Directors and President since the foundation of the company in 1936, Bledsom Van Rennan of New York. That's what you want, isn't it, Sir Beevor?'

'There now, Wallaby. My memory isn't what it was. But Van Rennan is an unusual name. I knew it connected up with something, and Elsie gave me the hint. Your friend may not be all you say he is as a bridge-player; but there's no doubt about his ability as a company director. You see where we are now, I suppose?'

Colonel Wallaby thought he did, but was quite ready to listen to further explanation.

'You know,' said Sir Beevor, 'or you ought to know, that at the beginning of the war the government laid it down that all American securities in this country should be handed over to them. An effort to peg the dollar exchange by holding credits in America. But I needn't go into all that. The essential thing is that any one holding securities had to give them up. Well, some men didn't. Thought they'd hold on to the big dividends they were getting. We prosecuted them when we caught them. But a few slipped through our net, camouflaged the dividends they received, and lay low. Now that acknowledgement of a cheque from Van Rennan looks to me like a dividend on some one's holding of Elsi shares. It may not be, but it looks like it. Otherwise that letter

is just nonsense. Birthday present from Elsie! That makes sense if you leave out the last E. Otherwise—well, is it likely that a man like Van Rennan would write letters about some girl's birthday present to some other girl? That's what he's done, sending a cheque, which Elton received. And you said he's a nasty piece of work, so I suppose he's not above a bit of trickery.'

'But Elton?' said Wallaby. Now that he understood what Sir Beevor suspected he was genuinely shocked. 'A man in Elton's position! Why the thing's a fraud.'

'The penalty is heavier than it would be for any ordinary fraud. But I don't say Elton is guilty. He may not hold the shares himself. May be only an intermediary. Perhaps quite an innocent intermediary.' Sir Beevor looked at the letter again. 'The money is to be forwarded to some one with an Irish name, quite unmistakably Irish. Well, Elton's Irish, isn't he? All these Irish stick together when they're not actually engaged in murdering one another. We may feel pretty sure that Elton knows who this Maureen is and where he or she is to be found. He's simply passing on the birthday present from Elsie, a nice tidy little investment on some Elsi shares. Not a bad birthday present at all.'

'Is there anything we ought to do? I mean, anything I can do in my office?'

'If the money is sent to any one in England you can't do anything, I suppose?'

'No. Letters to English addresses don't go through my hands at all.'

'But if, as seems most likely, the money is sent to some one in Ireland——'

'I can get at that.'

'Then I think you'd better. It's no affair of mine, of course, whether any one in Southern Ireland holds American securities. Eire, as they call it, is an independent country. Neither the King's writ nor Treasury regulations run there. So it does not matter to me who the Maureen with the unpronounceable address may be.

But it might matter to the Naval Intelligence people. They say—— I don't know, of course. But there are such things as submarines and they may be using the southern Irish coast. That's a wild guess. But I think the Naval Intelligence people would like to know where that money goes to and why it's paid.'

'But— Good God! That would be treason and you can't think that Elton——'

'I don't think anything. All I say is that it might be well to keep an eye on any letters Elton writes to Ireland, especially if they have a cheque in them.'

Thus it happened that Madeline, in the Censor's Office, received an order that excited and pleased her greatly. She felt that she was at last becoming a person of importance, and might look forward to the coveted promotion and a seat a little nearer the fire. Several other Madelines, Marjories, Olives and Joans in the same office received the same order, and, though they hardly hoped for promotion, welcomed a break in the monotony of their work.

Sir Beevor, laying his coffee-cup on the floor, rose from his uncomfortable perch on the green-covered settee. But Colonel Wallaby had not yet quite done with him.

'Oughtn't some inquiries to be made about the shares in that American company?' he said. 'I mean, can't you find out whether Elton has a holding or not?'

'Not my business,' said Sir Beevor. 'That's where the Bank of England comes in. You can drop them a hint if you like. I don't believe Elton's such a fool as to hang on to American securities. He's only some kind of intermediary, probably a trustee for some one in Ireland. But the Bank can find out. They'll tackle Elton's own bankers, who are sure to know. If they give Elton an O.K. there's no more to be said. But if you want the enquiry made, that's the way to go about it. I can't do it myself.'

After that he escaped from Colonel Wallaby who went back to his Censor's Office. Sir Beevor, who was in no

hurry, went to the smoking-room. He found, as he expected, two or three men lingering there. Most members of the Minerva go straight to their offices, Whitehall offices, immediately after lunch. A few realize that the war will go on much the same way whether they write minutes or not. They sit in comfortable chairs and refill their pipes. For them Sir Beevor produced what he thought an excellent joke.

'Any of you know Wallaby, Colonel Wallaby, fellow who has something to do with censorship?'

Every one, it appeared, knew Wallaby, or knew something of him.

'Military kind of ass, isn't he?'

'Worst bridge-player in the club.'

'Takes himself and his damned censoring much too seriously.'

'Exactly,' said Sir Beevor, 'and now he's hinting that Elton—you all know Elton—has taken to drink, and not only that. According to Wallaby—mind you there's not a word of truth in it—Elton's running rigs with a married woman.'

'Hope to goodness it's not the wife of any member here. Damned awkward for the committee if it is.'

'It's not the wife of any member anywhere. It's only Wallaby, and even he does no more than hint. There's no truth in it.'

But, though no one believed the hinted accusations, every one enjoyed hearing about them. A succulent piece of gossip, however incredible, is a pleasing thing, both to the hearer and to the teller, chiefly to the teller.

III

Sir Aylmer was surprised at the amount of money sent by Mr. Van Rennan. Two hundred and fifty dollars seemed to him an extravagantly large sum to send as a birthday present to a little girl whom nobody knew. In his letter of acknowledgement—the letter which excited

suspicion—he had made a mild joke. He knew quite well that Van Rennan had provided the money, but it was to be sent on in the name of his daughter Elsie. This gave him a chance of writing something which might amuse Van Rennan.

‘Elsie,’ he wrote, ‘must be doing well in New York. Regarded as an investment, her stay with you is paying a good dividend.’

This was not a good joke. Indeed it was very unfortunate. It lent colour to the suspicion that Elsie or Elsis, was an American security.

Sir Aylmer was of course aware that his letters must be read in the Censor’s Office. All letters leaving England are. But he never supposed that any one could take seriously his joke about Elsie paying dividends. He understood exactly what had happened and why the money was sent. By the very post which brought the cheque he received a long letter from Elsie. In it she reminded him of the dispatch of the bottle and told him what the letter contained. She described her own wonder on finding that it had actually drifted ashore and been found by a little girl on a remote West of Ireland island. In her envelope Elsie enclosed a copy of Maureen’s heavily censored letter, and a description of the photograph of the Innishbofin children.

This made the whole matter clear to Sir Aylmer. He sent the American cheque to his bank, and, as soon as the value of it in English currency was ascertained, dispatched his own cheque to Maureen, with a note explaining that the money was the gift of his daughter, the original sender of the letter in the bottle. He added, as a word of advice from himself, that the money was to be spent precisely as Maureen herself wished, but that it would be wise to lodge some of it in a bank.

After that he considered that he had done all that was required of him and dismissed the matter from his mind. This was easy enough to do, for Sir Aylmer was a very busy man. As the chief of the Ministry of Co-ordination,

under a minister who did not count, his thoughts were continually occupied with immensely complex problems and he had neither time nor inclination for the fancies of little girls. There is perhaps no civil servant who has to face such difficulties as those which came on Sir Aylmer every day. Co-ordination is a very hard thing to accomplish anywhere. It is wellnigh impossible when there are hundreds—Sir Aylmer often thought thousands—of Ministries, Departments, Boards and Authorities whose activities have to be co-ordinated. Their functions are never clearly defined. They continually overlap. Each has its own policy adopted without consultation with any of the others. Each has its own system of controls, all designed, quite properly, to keep the outside public in a state of subjection. Each is eager to go its own way when going is easy, and even more anxious to get rid of anything troublesome by passing it on to some one else. Through this morass it was Sir Aylmer's duty to find safe paths along which travellers—ministers, chairmen, and presidents—could go safely without being smothered in the mud which they themselves had created. It was small wonder that Elsie's letter and Mr. Van Rennan's generosity passed from his mind. He did indeed receive a note from the manager of the branch of the City and Suburban Bank in which he kept his account. It was a politely worded request that Sir Aylmer would call at the bank at some day and hour convenient to him. This was surprising, for his account was far from being overdrawn and there had been, so far as he knew, nothing irregular about the cheques he had written. The bank manager, when Sir Aylmer was shown into his room, was most apologetic.

'I'm very sorry,' he said, 'to trouble a busy man like yourself, but I think you ought to know that the Bank of England people have been making inquiries whether you hold any American securities.'

'I don't,' said Sir Aylmer.

'So I told them, and I hope they are satisfied: but

they seem to have got into their heads that you did. I can't imagine why they should think so, and I hope I made it quite clear that you didn't. But it is just possible that they may approach you personally in the matter. So I thought I'd better let you know that inquiries have been made.'

Sir Aylmer, whose conscience was perfectly clear, laughed.

'Never held an American security in my life,' he said. 'You know that perfectly well.'

'Of course, of course,' said the manager. 'I think I made that perfectly clear. I don't suppose you'll hear anything more about the matter.'

Sir Aylmer never did, nor had he any reason to connect the Bank of England's inquiry with Van Rennan's cheque.

Sir Beevor's cheerful smoke-room gossip was more troublesome. Now and then some friend asked him whether it was true that he intended to get married again.

'No. Certainly not,' Sir Aylmer used to reply. 'Much too busy to think of such a thing. What put that into your head?'

'Oh, I don't know.' Each friend said much the same thing. 'Heard it somewhere, I suppose.'

And each friend, faced with this definite denial, went away, believing that Mistress Alison Wilson was right in saying that a man, if he did not marry, was likely to 'do worse'.

There were even one or two men—such is the persuasive power of gossip—who asked Sir Aylmer, confidentially, where he got his whisky, and how he kept up the supply. To these inquiries he could only say that he was perfectly satisfied with the bottle a month allocated to him by his wine merchant. This was taken as evidence that Sir Aylmer had a private source of supply.

There was nothing in all this to remind him of Elsie's letter or Van Rennan's cheque. He might never have thought of these again if it had not been for a visit he

received some six weeks after he posted his letter to Innishbofin. The visitor announced himself, on a card sent in to Sir Aylmer, as belonging to Naval Intelligence. This surprised Sir Aylmer. The Admiralty—Naval Intelligence must be part of the Admiralty—was the one body whose activities Sir Aylmer never had to co-ordinate with those of anybody else. Majestic and mighty as one of its own battleships, the Admiralty goes its own way serenely, without considering the feelings, dignity, plans or activities of any other Ministry or Board. Not unnaturally every one else keeps out of the way, and the necessity for co-ordination does not arise.

It seemed still more odd that an officer from Naval Intelligence had been sent to him. If by any remote chance the Board of Trade, Ministry of Fuel and Power or any one else had got in the way of the Admiralty, Sir Aylmer was quite ready to co-ordinate the obstructors out of existence. But he could not see why the Admiralty chose an Intelligence Officer to make their complaint.

The officer, a captain with several medals and an injured arm, was shown into Sir Aylmer's office. He was offered a chair and a cigarette.

'I'm sorry I can't offer you a drink.' Sir Aylmer never kept whisky in his office. But even if he had had a bottle of whisky tucked away in a cupboard, it is doubtful whether he would have given any to a visitor. He had been asked about whisky so often that he was becoming shy of the subject.

'Of course,' he went on cheerfully, 'if I'd known I was to have a visit from a naval man I should have had a bottle of rum ready for you. That's what you fellows drink, isn't it?'

The officer, who gave his name as Hillary, seemed a little embarrassed by this friendly reception. He accepted the cigarette, sat down in the offered chair and explained that naval officers drank other things besides rum.

'And besides I'm here strictly on business, and it doesn't do to mix up drinks with business.'

'Quite right,' said Sir Aylmer. 'Business takes the pleasure out of a drink and a drink isn't good for business. Now what can I do for you? If anybody has been holding up the Admiralty—the Ministry of Housing, for instance. They're always obstructive. But whatever it is I'll straighten things out at once. We must have battleships. Far more important than houses.'

Captain Hillary smiled again, a little nervously. He had never before come in contact with a highly placed civil servant.

'I think,' he said, 'that I had better get straight to business without wasting time.'

Sir Aylmer had a good deal of experience of men, co-ordinatees, all of whom professed to be eager to get straight to business without waste of time. He found that those who began an interview in this way generally talked for half an hour or so before their business was even distantly in sight. He was accustomed, on these occasions, to settle himself in his chair as comfortably as he could and remind himself of de Buffon's saying that genius is nothing else but an aptitude for patience. This time he did not have to convince himself of his own genius. Captain Hillary went straight to the point.

'Do you know anything of a man called Phelim?'

Sir Aylmer did not. The name seemed to him one which he had heard before, he could not remember when or where. His secretary had filled in the cheque for the amount of Van Rennan's donation. Sir Aylmer had done no more than sign it. And that was six weeks ago. It was small wonder that the name of the payee had slipped his memory.

'Thaddaeus Phelim,' said Captain Hillary.

This was no help at all. Except as one of the original twelve apostles, Sir Aylmer had never heard of any one called Thaddaeus, and of the apostle he could remember nothing except that his surname was Lebaeus. It certainly was not Phelim.

'No,' said Sir Aylmer. 'I have no recollection of the

name. I'm sorry, but I can't help you there. Or perhaps—I might have a search made through our files. There are an enormous number of them. It will occupy my whole staff weeks to go through them all. Still, if you really want it done——' Sir Aylmer was well aware that it would not do to stand in the way of the Admiralty even if the whole work of his Ministry was to be held up for a month or two. 'But perhaps you could give me some idea of his business. That would give me some help in short-circuiting the search.'

'His business,' said Captain Hillary grimly, 'is treason.'

'Good heavens!' said Sir Aylmer.

He had co-ordinated, or failed to co-ordinate, a great number of people, some of them angry, some full of self importance, some merely stupid. Never before had he been asked to co-ordinate a traitor, though even this he was prepared to undertake if the Admiralty wanted it done.

Captain Hillary had, up to this point, taken it for granted that there had been some mistake in connecting Sir Aylmer with an Irishman whose record for subversive opinions and actions was beyond dispute. It seemed impossible that a man like Sir Aylmer could be mixed up with such a man as Thaddaeus Phelim. He had Colonel Wallaby's assurance that Sir Aylmer had corresponded with this man and sent him money. Those facts were undeniable. But Captain Hillary felt sure that there must be some simple and quite innocent explanation. Now he was not so sure. Sir Aylmer's assertion that he knew nothing about a man to whom he had certainly written at least one letter was strange. Captain Hillary became suspicious.

Colonel Wallaby, following Sir Beevor's advice, had reported the dispatch of Sir Aylmer's letter and cheque to the Naval Intelligence people. As in duty bound, the Naval people had made inquiries about Thaddaeus Phelim. This was, for them, a simple matter. They had agents and secret sources of information everywhere. They had

a man, a fairly reliable man, who lived not very far from Innishbofin and was in a position to give information about anybody or anything in that part of Connaught. This agent had sent a most unfavourable report on Thaddaeus Phelim. The man was an out and out republican, a bitter enemy of England, a hater of anything English. He was suspected of being in friendly communication with the Germans, through submarines which often came ashore on the deserted coasts of Innishbofin. Here the Admiralty's agent went rather too far in his report. He had no evidence that any submarine had approached Innishbofin and none that Thaddaeus Phelim had made contact with Germans by means of submarines or any other way. A secret service agent often behaves in this way. A really striking, even sensational report enhances his reputation for energy and intelligence.

'We have information,' said Captain Hillary, 'that you recently sent a cheque to this man for forty or fifty pounds.'

'I certainly did not,' said Sir Aylmer.

'The cheque was made payable,' said Captain Hillary, 'to Maureen Phelim, probably the wife of Thaddaeus. Rather a futile effort at concealment, if I may say so.'

Then, with a shock of surprise, Sir Aylmer recollected Mr. Van Rennan's cheque and his own. The name Phelim came back to his memory. He felt that there was some justification for the naval officer's suspicion. But the whole thing was, as he thought, quite easily explained.

'I remember now,' he said, 'that I sent a cheque to a little girl called Maureen Phelim. It was a birthday present to her from my own daughter, a child of nine, at present in America.'

Captain Hillary raised his eyebrows in a way that suggested complete unbelief. He had now become deeply suspicious. Sir Aylmer's story, dragged out of him, was quite incredible.

'A birthday present to a little girl, apparently a

peasant, in an almost unknown island off the Connaught coast ! Is that what you wish me to report to my Chief ? Or is there any other explanation of your action which you wish to make ? '

Sir Aylmer Elton was a civil servant, trained through long years to keep his temper under any provocation. But he was also an Irishman, and behind the veneer of suavity there lurked a capacity for sudden and rather violent anger. Captain Hillary had disbelieved him and received his statement with sneers.

' You can report any damned thing you like to your chief,' he said. ' I am not going to add anything to what I've just said and I'm certainly not going to offer you any sort of explanation for a perfectly innocent action.'

He had indeed no explanation which he cared to offer. He was angry, but he was not so angry as not to realize that the story he might have told was not likely to remove Captain Hillary's suspicions. He would have had to begin with the launching of Elsie's bottle from the *Ukrania*. That was such an unusual thing for any one to do that it would sound like fiction. Nor would it be easy for Captain Hillary to believe that a bottle flung into the sea in the middle of the Atlantic would be washed ashore on the West of Ireland coast. Such a thing might happen, but the chances were very heavily against it. Then there was the unexpected amount of money sent by Van Rennan. Would it be possible to persuade any one that a hard-headed American business man—all American business men are hard-headed—would throw away forty or fifty pounds in such a way ?

Sir Aylmer knew that he could produce a good deal of evidence in support of his story. There was Elsie's letter telling the story of the bottle. He had that. There was the copy of Maureen's reply. The bank would have some record of the passing of Van Rennan's cheque. But Sir Aylmer was much too angry to attempt to justify himself to Captain Hillary in any such way.

As a last resort, if the Admiralty took the matter


seriously and actually accused him of treason, all this evidence could be produced and would surely convince any one of his entire innocence. But he could not believe that the Admiralty would do anything so absurd. His character, established for long years as a faithful civil servant, set him outside the risk of such an accusation. Even the Admiralty would hesitate to face the scandal of accusing a man in his position of so desperate a crime. Captain Hillary, a man of most offensive manners, would make his report, no doubt, but no one in authority would take any notice of it. Sir Aylmer knew very well what happens to inconvenient and troublesome reports. There are pigeon-holes in every office for such documents, and once lodged in such receptacles the reports are very unlikely to see the light of day again. So Sir Aylmer reasoned.

'I'm sorry,' said Captain Hillary. 'I should greatly prefer to hear your explanation, if you have one.'

His voice did not sound the least as if he were sorry. Indeed the tone suggested that he was rather glad to have his suspicions confirmed. There is always a satisfaction to be found in unmasking a traitor and pinning down the lies he tells in self-defence. Captain Hillary rose and bowed, and left the room without offering to shake hands with Sir Aylmer.

'I fear'—his last words as he paused for a moment at the door were a threat—'I fear we shall have to go into this matter thoroughly. You will, no doubt, hear from us again.'

Sir Aylmer's long experience of office procedure, of reports and pigeon-holes, misled him. He reasoned wrongly. The Naval Intelligence people acted in a most unpleasant and troublesome way. They are a part of the Admiralty organization, and the Admiralty, as Sir Aylmer ought to have known, have their own ways of managing their affairs.



PART VI

INNISHBOFIN

I

THE SCHOOL clock struck three, the hour at which Irish children are let out of school and go home, hungry, to dinner. Michael McCarthy locked up his desk, gathered the few papers he meant to take with him, and gave the signal for dismissal. In a couple of minutes the schoolroom was cleared of children. Michael, the most trying part of his day's work done, followed his pupils, whistling as he went the Soldiers' Song, a melancholy tune, but suited to the present mood and indeed the general temper of the schoolmaster. He was not naturally a cheerful man, and life had made him sadder. The prospects of a move to some more important post were as remote as ever, nor were he and his friends any more hopeful of destroying the existing government of Ireland, bringing the recalcitrant Ulster to its knees, or doing any serious injury to the British Empire.

Outside, though Michael McCarthy took no notice of it, there was a gathering of the village people in front of the post office. It was not an impressive building, being no more than a mud-walled, thatch-roofed cottage, like any other house in the village. Yet—and this would have surprised a stranger—a good deal of business was done in it. Letters arrived, and a large number of them contained postal orders from sons and daughters who had gone to work in England. These brought much gain to the islanders. Like the silversmiths of Ephesus who grew rich out of the manufacture of images of their goddess, the islanders were making money out of what Michael McCarthy regarded as an unholy traffic. St. Paul nearly lost his life in the effort to bring home to the Ephesians a sense of their iniquity. Michael McCarthy,

unlike St. Paul, made no effort to do the impossible. He made no protest against this profitable emigration; but he quieted his conscience. He held, or said he held, that by taking so much money of England the young men and maidens were depriving that country of the means of waging war.

About one thing neither McCarthy's conscience or any one else's could be satisfied. A certain number of the emigrants, moved by that strange love of fighting for its own sake which has always characterized the Irish, took advantage of their arrival in England to join the army. The men enlisted in one or other of the Irish regiments which had survived the treaty of their country's liberation. The girls became either A.T.S. or W.A.A.F. There was no profit in this, for none of them earned enough to have money to send home postal orders, so McCarthy's conscience-salving was needless. The best that could be done was to ignore these traitors. That was McCarthy's word for them. Their names were not mentioned except in strict privacy by their mothers. The battle honours which come often to these fighters by nature were never boasted of. Even the newspapers ignored them.

At three o'clock exactly, as the children escaped from school, Thomas the Post stepped out of the office with a bundle of letters in his hand. There was an interested stir among the group of people who waited for him. The children, naturally enough, pushed their way through the waiting women. The prospect of even a mild excitement conquered their hunger and put off their return to home and dinner. They behaved in this way every day if the postal delivery began punctually. This time they were richly rewarded.

Thomas the Post, unwilling to lose any of the attraction which made him an important figure, was in no hurry to part with the letters. He looked round at the waiting people, pushed aside a small boy who got too near him, and caught sight of Maureen Phelim in the background.

'Maureen,' he said, and, since there were three Maureens among the girls, he made his meaning clearer. 'Maureen Phelim. Come here to me, and don't be hiding yourself behind Mrs. Flanagan so that I might not hardly see you.'

Maureen moved towards him, uncertain what fault of hers could account for this official summons.

'I've a letter here for Maureen Phelim,' said Thomas the Post. 'Do you want it, or do you not?'

'I do,' said Maureen.

'For if you want it you'd better come and take it.'

Maureen moved farther forward and stretched out her hand. Thomas the Post picked out a letter from his bundle, but he did not at once give it to her.

'There's an English stamp on it,' he said, speaking more to the crowd than to Maureen, 'and it's from London it comes, according to what's stamped on the outside which is likely enough to be right.'

Letters with English stamps, even letters bearing London postmarks, are not, as has been explained, rare in Innishbofin. But it is very seldom that one comes addressed to a little girl. There was a movement of slight curiosity among the waiting people and some of the children said 'Ooh' enviously.

Maureen's hand was still outstretched, but Thomas the Post did not yet give her the letter.

'Would you like now that I'd open it so as I could read it for you?'

Like every one else he wanted to learn what a letter from London addressed to Maureen could be about. He knew that the Phelims had no relatives in England. On Innishbofin every one knows all about the family affairs of every one else, and he was sure that Maureen had neither uncle nor aunt in London.

Maureen was quite firm in her refusal of his offer.

'I would not,' she said.

'It'll be in writing of hand the letter will be,' said Thomas the Post persuasively, 'and that's different altogether from what print would be. There's many a

one can read a book or a newspaper that would be hard set to find out what's in a letter. Can you read it now? I know well that your Ma won't be able to help you, for she's no scholar. Will you be able yourself?'

'I will,' said Maureen.

After that there was nothing for it but to hand over the letter. Thomas the Post resigned himself to the inevitable with a sigh of disappointment. His sigh was repeated by the women who had gathered round him. They also were disappointed.

Maureen took her letter and at once set off on her long walk home along the strand. She did not go alone. Six of her school-fellows went with her, all of them girls. The boys were perhaps too eager for their dinners to put off their return home. Or perhaps they felt it to be beneath their dignity to show any interest in a little girl's letter, or to admit to the curiosity which they must have felt. The girls were franker. At first they hinted to Maureen that she might open her letter and read it. Then, when no notice was taken of their hints, they made direct appeals to her.

'Will you not open your letter now, Maureen?'

'Ah, now, Maureen, do!'

'What harm would it do you?'

'There might be money in it!'

'Sure we wouldn't tell on you, whatever is in it.'

'Ah, now, Maureen, do!'

To all these appeals Maureen answered simply and directly:

'I will not.'

One by one the girls, realizing that Maureen was inflexible, turned back, leaving her to finish her walk alone. She quickened her pace. Sometimes she ran for a while. She was just as anxious as any one else to know what was in the letter, but she would not open it until she reached the security and privacy of her own home.

One thing about the letter disappointed her. She had for weeks been hoping for, perhaps expecting, a reply

from the Elsie who had put the first letter into the bottle. But this letter came from London. Thomas the Post had said so, and Maureen, after looking at the postmark two or three times, knew that he was right. But Elsie, the Elsie to whom she had written, lived in New York. A letter with an English stamp and a London postmark could hardly have come from her. Maureen wondered, but even a letter from some stranger in London was sufficiently exciting.

At last she reached the cottage and found her mother trying, with much scolding, to clean up her small brother. The child had seized the opportunity, when his mother's back was turned, to sit down in a pot of turnips, boiled and mashed for the pigs' consumption. Fortunately, the pot had been taken from the fire some time before, but the turnips were still warm. The seat was as soft as any cushion could have been, and no cushion would have provided the comforting glow of heat. The child had enjoyed it for a while. He did not enjoy the cleaning which followed at the hands of an angry mother.

'You're home early, Maureen,' said Bridget. 'Your Da's not in yet.'

She looked up from her work as she spoke and the small boy whimpered. Maureen was glad to hear of her father's absence. He had taken her last letter from her. She did not want him to get this one.

'Where would he be?' she asked.

'It's out on the sea in the curragh he is,' said Bridget, 'trying can he catch some sort of a fish off the rocks. It's seldom he gets one these times. You'd think the creatures had made their minds up not to be caught. But God is good.'

Maureen, a piously brought up child, knew that God is good, but she hoped that, this evening, He would not be immediately good. The longer it was before a fish changed its mind about being caught the better the chance of keeping the letter from her father's grasp.

'It's a letter,' she said.

'Holy Mother!' said Bridget. 'Are you after finding another bottle? It's a wonderful little girleen you are. Not another like you on Innishbofin.'

'It's not out of a bottle this one came. It was Thomas the Post gave it to me, the same as he might be giving a letter to any one else. There's a stamp on it and it's from London it came.'

Bridget, excited and wondering, set down the small boy, and he quite unrepentingly made off towards the turnip pot again.

'Will you show it to me now,' she said, 'and not keep me here wondering is it a real letter or some trick that Thomas the Post is after playing on you.'

Maureen handed over the envelope. Bridget took it carefully by one corner. Her hands were covered with mashed turnip. She did not wish to injure what might be a very precious letter by smearing it.

'It's real enough,' she said, 'but it's queer. I don't know did ever I see a letter which was printed on the outside the same as this one.'

The letter and the envelope dispatched from the Ministry of Co-ordination had been typed by Sir Aylmer's secretary. Few, if any, of the emigrants from Innishbofin had access to typewriters, and there is no such machine on the island.

'Will we open it?' said Bridget. 'Or will we wait till your Da comes home?'

'We will not wait.'

'You were always venturesome,' said Bridget, 'you and the little lad are the same that way, and it's not after me you take it. Will you look at him now?'

The little lad had once more sat down in the turnip pot.

'But sure what harm?' said Bridget. 'The turnips isn't hot enough to scald him, and what's a little dirt on him so long as he's happy? Let you be opening the letter now, Maureen, if that's what your mind is set on. If there's harm in it that same will be before us, anyway, whether we wait for your Da to come home or not.'

II

Maureen tore open the envelope and spread out the letter. Bridget peered over her daughter's shoulder at the typewritten sheet.

'It isn't a letter at all,' she said. 'It's printed like as if it was a book.'

'It is a letter,' said Maureen.

Sir Aylmer's cheque fluttered to the ground. Bridget picked it up and scanned it eagerly. Living in a corner of Innishbofin as she had all her life, she had never come across a cheque before. She was puzzled.

'It could be,' she said, 'that it's some kind of a postal order.'

With postal orders she was familiar, though having no children old enough to go to England or America she had never herself received one. But postal orders were common enough on Innishbofin, and were often shown by one neighbour to another before being cashed.

'Thomas the Post,' she said, 'will tell us what is best to be done with it, if so be it's a postal order. It's not like any one ever I seen, but it may be that.'

'It's to a bank it's to be took,' said Maureen.

'And how are we to be taking it to a bank? Me that never was inside the like of such a place in my life.'

'It's in the letter,' said Maurcen, 'that it's to a bank it's to be took.'

Bridget stared at the cheque and gradually realized the meaning of the figures on it.

'Glory be to God!' she said. 'It's a mighty lot of money, more money, I'd say, than there is in the whole of Innishbofin. If you was to empty the pockets of every man on the island and the till of the post office along with that, you'd be hard set to get as much.'

Bridget under-estimated the resources of the island. The people were poor, but among them they possessed more than fifty pounds in actual cash, and that without reckoning the treasure stored in the post office.

'It's for my own self,' said Maureen. 'It's in the letter that it's for me.'

Sir Aylmer had made this quite clear in his letter. Maureen read the words out to her mother.

'It is. It is,' said Bridget. 'You'll be the richest girl on Innishbofin, Maureen, no matter who the other one may be.' Then, since it is difficult at first to realize immense and unexpected good fortune, Bridget was assailed by a doubt. 'If so be that a bit of paper like that can be so much money.'

'It can,' said Maureen who had no doubt at all. 'It is.' She took the cheque from her mother. 'Doesn't it say so there? "Pay Maureen Phelim"—and would the bank go against that?'

'If so be the bank has the money.'

'Banks,' said Maureen, 'has all the money there is in the world.'

Michael McCarthy, greatly daring, had once given a course of talks on Economics, advocating the nationalization of all banks and the division of their funds among the poorer classes of the community. Maureen, not a very attentive listener, had learned that all banks are immensely and most improperly rich.

Bridget's mind, racing ahead into the still distant future, saw that Maureen, when she grew up, would be an heiress, if only the money could be secured and kept. In the west of Ireland a girl's matrimonial prospects depend almost entirely on the amount of her fortune. Love matches are rare and always frowned on. A marriage is a matter of bargaining over the girl's dowry. Parents will save and deny themselves in order to have ready a dowry when a daughter reaches a marriageable age. Bridget had never been able to save a single pound. Any surplus money—and there was very little—had been spent by Thaddaeus on the great cause to which he was devoted, the cause of the liberation of Holy Ireland from the tyranny of an oppressor.

There is nowhere a wife more loyal to her husband

than Bridget. Never once had she complained about the time wasted in reading books, time which might have been spent in profitable work. She had grudged, but never protested, against the giving of money to the organization her husband supported. To her the books, the politics and the poetry were 'foolishness', the sort of foolishness on which men spent time, energy, and money. But according to her view of life all men are given to foolishness of one kind or another, and surely she was fortunate that poetry, though an almost incredible kind of foolishness, was better than whisky, a more intelligible thing from which many of her neighbours had to suffer.

Yet all the time, ever since Maureen was born, and more and more as she grew from a baby into a schoolgirl, Bridget had been haunted by the fear that there would be no money for her daughter when the time came for finding her a husband. Now, out of the lap of the Gods, unhopd for, even undreamed of, came a fortune for her daughter, which, if only it could be kept safe and not wasted on 'foolishness', would make Maureen the richest girl on the island, and secure for her a husband, a choice of husbands, from the most desirable young men on the island.

'I don't know,' she said, but a little doubtfully, 'I don't know that I'd be saying too much to your Da about the letter and what was in it.'

Maureen had no doubts at all. She remembered what had happened to the first letter.

'I will not,' she said.

'No girl ever had a better Da than what you have,' said Bridget, 'nor no woman a better man to care for her. But'—she sighed—'all men is given to foolishness, and if it isn't one thing it's another. It's the nature of the way God made them, and your Da is no different from the rest of them.'

'It's to the bank I'll take it,' said Maureen, 'and unbeknown to my Da.'

'To the bank! What do you know about banks or the way of them?'

'There's a bank in Ballynephan,' said Maureen. 'I know that much, anyway.'

Here Maureen's knowledge was not as perfect as she thought. Ballynephan has not got a bank of its own. It is a small town some two miles from the end of the bridge which connects Innishbofin with the mainland. It would not be worth while for any banking company to establish a branch there. But, since it is worth while to pick up even small scraps of business, two members of the staff of the Connaught Bank, established in a neighbouring and much larger town, drive over to Ballynephan once a week. There they open an office in a small and gloomy room conveniently situated next door to a public-house. Here for some hours they receive such money as is offered to them, and cash cheques for customers whose accounts are not seriously overdrawn. Every Irish town, however small, has its occasional fair, and on these days the bankers pay an additional visit to Ballynephan and do a surprising amount of business.

'It's the pig fair in Ballynephan to-morrow,' said Maureen. 'I know that, for Mary Geraghty, who's a friend of mine in school, was telling me only to-day that her Da is taking over a couple of bonhams, thinking he'd get a better price for them there than he would on the island. It's to-morrow I'll go, for the bank will be there surely on account of all the people that does be in it for the pig fair.'

'Would you dare it, Maureen, you that's no more than a slip of a girl to be going all that way to a strange place and maybe facing up to some grand gentleman in the bank who might have no more to say to you only to run away out of that and not be bothering him?'

'I would dare it,' said Maureen. 'Why wouldn't I when I'll have all that money in my pocket? Wouldn't the gentleman in the bank be proud to see me when I show him what came in the letter?'

'It's terrible venturesome you are, Maureen.'

But Maureen was not quite so venturesome as her mother thought, nor, in spite of her boasting, was she sure of her ability to face up against a strange gentleman in a bank.

'I would be glad enough,' she said, 'if you was to come along with me.'

'And what would your Da be saying if I was to walk off to a pig fair in Ballynephán? Wouldn't he be asking what I wanted there? And if I was to tell him about the bank and the money——'

'You'll not tell him that,' said Maureen, 'for if you do he'll be taking it off me and most likely give me a wipe with the stick to learn me not to do it again.'

'What'll I say to him?'

'You'll say that it's looking for a young bonham that you're going to Ballynephán, and there'll be no lie about that, for you might; and if you don't buy one it'll do you no harm to be looking at what's in it.'

'It's what we'd be the better of,' said Bridget, 'is a young bonham. We could do with one, so we could. That's true enough, though it would be a long time before I'd be going to Ballynephán for it.'

She would not have admitted it to herself, but she was very curious about the reception Maureen's cheque would receive from the gentleman in the bank, without doubt a very grand gentleman indeed. She might have developed and improved the bonham-buying invention if her attention had not been called to her young son. He had left his seat in the turnip pot, which had grown too cold to be comfortable, and was tugging at her skirt, demanding an egg to roast in the ashes of the turf fire. He would probably have got a scolding and, still worse, a cleaning, if Thaddaeus Phelim had not just then returned from his fishing. He had not been very successful. He brought with him only one fish, a large lithe. It was a handsome fish to look at, dark green and well shaped. It is a fish which makes a good fight for life when hooked,

and so gives pleasure to fishermen with sporting instincts. But the lithe is of all fish the least eatable and most lacking in flavour when cooked.

Maureen made haste to conceal the envelope, letter and cheque, pushing them into the neck of her frock, the nearest and perhaps the safest hiding-place.

Phelim laid down the fish on the kitchen table. He settled himself on his accustomed seat in the chimney corner and took from the shelf above him a small, grey bound volume of the poems of the young Irishmen. In a minute or two he was absorbed.

How did they pass the Union?
By Pitt and Castlereagh.
Could Satan send for such an end
More fitting tools than they?

It was not likely that a man with such winged words before his eyes would ask questions about what his wife and little daughter had been saying and doing. Maureen felt that the letter was safe. Bridget turned her attention to the fish.

III

Few small Irish towns are beautiful. They conform very much to a pattern. For public buildings there are two churches—one Protestant, spinsterish, aloof from the life of the people, planned by an architect with a soap box in mind, given an ecclesiastical flavour by the addition of a spire; the other, Roman Catholic, if new, excruciatingly ornate, if old or middle-aged—few churches in Ireland are old—plain, without the merit of simplicity. There is also a court-house, grim as the house of Irish justice usually is, dirty, since it is no one's business to keep it clean, giving an impression of melancholy dilapidation. A narrow street contains public-houses and drapers' shops: many more public-houses than drapers' shops.

On ordinary days these towns seem not sleepy, for sleep is a pleasant restful thing, but dead, with post-mortem staining making its appearance here and there.

On market days the whole place comes to life. The public-houses are well filled, growing fuller towards evening. Women wander in and out of the drapers' shops, bargaining, buying, gossiping. On fair days the place is crowded. Men, women and animals jostle each other in the streets. There are shouts. There are waving sticks and the thwacks of blows on the apparently unfeeling backs of cattle.

Ballynephan differs in no way from sister towns of the same size.

It is ugly, dirty, and, for the most part of the year, moribund or dead. But on one great day, the day of the annual pig fair, Ballynephan achieves a tumultuous life. Very early men arrive—elderly men in long frieze coats, younger men in loud tweed jackets and yellow leather gaiters splashed with mud. These come in carts, into which the pigs they hope to sell are crowded, or on rough ponies if they are buyers, not sellers. Others arrive in ancient motors from a distant railway station. These are the men in big business, who buy largely to supply bacon factories in greater towns as far off, perhaps, as Limerick. In sharp contrast to these important buyers are the small men from remote farms, known as 'mountainy men', though their land may not be on mountain or even hillsides. They come on foot, driving before them a single pig with a stout cord tied to one of its hind legs. They come hopeful of taking home a little money, prepared for hours of hard bargaining. With the men are women, seated uncomfortably among the pigs in carts or riding sideways on the hips of small donkeys.

By eight o'clock in the morning the streets are full of pigs, women and men. A slimy mud lies everywhere. The air is heavy with the smell of pig, mingled with the sour odour of stale turf smoke from the clothes of people who have spent their days and nights in cottages with inefficient chimneys. The streets are blocked with pigs and groups of gossiping women. The sidewalks are impassable, for one cannot walk on the backs of pigs, and

there is no space between the animals. The doors of houses are blocked so that ingress and egress are difficult, and the inhabitants, if timid or fastidious, are shut in for the day. Fortunately, very few people in Ballynephan dislike pigs or are afraid of them. Pigs, sometimes shapeless sows with their litters, have settled on door-steps, scarcely to be disturbed by the flailing sticks of the householders. Everywhere there is the clamour of the voices of men bargaining long and violently, and when agreement on price is established there follows a renewal, often a more prolonged bargaining, over the amount of the 'luck', that mysterious bonus returned to the seller by the buyer after the price is settled.

It was towards this distant turmoil that Bridget and Maureen set out from their home, starting very early in the morning. They wore their best clothes—Bridget, a crimson petticoat, a thick shawl fastened where it crossed in front with a silver brooch, instead of a hat a head hankerchief; Maureen, more modern as suited her age, a shop-bought frock of shoddy blue material. Both of them carried in their hands their shoes and stockings, garments seldom worn except on Sundays. They had an eight-mile walk in front of them, and, for those accustomed to the freedom of bare feet, shoes are tiresome, often painful things to wear for any long time. They were carried because it was desirable for the sake of appearance—what Bridget called 'decency'—to put them on before entering a town like Ballynephan.

Fortune favoured these walkers. After passing the strand, and just before reaching the bridge which led to the mainland, they were overtaken by Thomas Geraghty in his cart. He, too, was going to Ballynephan and had with him in the cart five bonhams which he hoped to sell at the fair. Thomas Geraghty was the father of Mary, the school-friend who had told Maureen about the fair. He was also a friend of Thaddaeus, being an earnest patriot and a member of the organization which Michael McCarthy, the schoolmaster, controlled.

As a good neighbour and a friend it was natural that Thomas Geraghty should stop his cart and offer to drive Bridget and Maureen into Ballynephan. He could hardly have done otherwise, but he made his offer willingly. Being interested in his neighbours' affairs, he wanted to find out if he could why Bridget was going to the fair. She had no pig to sell. It was most unlikely that she had money enough to buy one. And for either selling or buying it would have been more usual for Thaddaeus to go to Ballynephan. Irishmen do not usually leave such important matters to their wives. For the presence of Maureen, Geraghty could not guess at any reason. On occasions when business is to be done, children are, very sensibly, left at home.

Bridget and Maureen gladly accepted the offer. Bridget climbed in to the front of the cart and sat down beside Geraghty. Maureen made herself comfortable among the young pigs.

Geraghty began his catechism at once.

'And what might be bringing you to Ballynephan, Mrs. Phelim?'

Bridget had fully expected some such enquiry, and she had no intention whatever of telling the story of Maureen's fortune, and the visit to the bank she intended to make. The direct question did not embarrass her. To use her own phrase, she was 'equal to Thomas Geraghty'. She met the direct question in the only way in which direct questions can be met, with a direct, and quite untruthful, answer.

'I was thinking that I might be able to get a young bonham cheap,' she said. 'We could do with the like, having more small potatoes than it is convenient for us to be eating.'

The answer had satisfied Thaddaeus. It did not satisfy Geraghty. He had four bonhams in the cart with him. Bridget could have bought one of them if she wished to without making the long journey to Ballynephan. Geraghty, like all Irish peasants, was a man

of good manners. He made no further effort to enquire about what Bridget did not want to tell. But he was still curious. Indeed his curiosity had increased. He intended, if he could, to find out before the day was over what Bridget really wanted in Ballynephan, and why she had brought Maureen with her instead of sending her to school as he had sent his Mary.

Bridget and Maureen went straight to the shabby little room where the officials of the Connaught Bank did their business. For so important a day the Manager had himself come to Ballynephan, bringing with him two members of his staff. Bridget and Maureen entered the room hand in hand. That was how a casual observer would have described their entrance. In reality, Maureen had grasped her mother's hand and led her forward. At the last moment Bridget had shrunk from going in to so strange and crowded a place. Maureen, determined and still venturesome, had to drag her mother with her.

Already business was going briskly. Buyers, large buyers, had brought with them letters of credit from distant banks. In exchange for these they wanted notes, pound notes, for it is only with notes that payment can be made at fairs, where the cheque of the stranger would not have been acceptable. Among these were men, the more well-to-do local men, who wanted to lodge in the bank the money they had received from the buyers. One or another of them wanted to cash his own cheque, usually for a small sum, to pay for what he had bought or meant to buy. The two bank cashiers were busy, very busy indeed, handing out money or receiving back again the same notes they had paid out a few minutes before. At the back of the room sat the manager, denied for lack of accomodation the dignity of a private room. Here he was ready to give his decision about a doubtful letter of credit, or the advisability of cashing a cheque for a customer whose account was already overdrawn.

At first no one took any notice of Bridget and Maureen. They were unimportant people, and it did not seem

likely that they had any business with the bank at all. But after a while Maureen, still holding fast her mother's hand, managed to squeeze her way to the counter, through the crowd of waiting men. One of the cashiers, a kindly man, asked what he could do for her. Maureen handed him her cheque. He looked at it a little suspiciously. London cheques are very rare in Ballynephán, and not common even in the larger branches of the Connaught Bank. Also it is not usual for a little girl of ten years old to present a cheque for fifty pounds.

'Is this yours?' said the cashier, 'or did some one else ask you to get it cashed for him?'

'It's Maureen's,' said Bridget.

The payee named on the cheque was certainly Maureen. Bridget's gesture made it clear that the little girl at the counter was the Maureen to whom the cheque was payable.

'I'm afraid,' said the cashier, 'that I can't cash this without the consent of the manager.'

He went to the back of the room taking the cheque with him. After a few minutes' talk the cashier led Bridget and Maureen to the table where the manager sat.

'I don't think I can cash this,' he said, 'simply on the young lady's signature.'

It was the first time in her life that Maureen had been called a young lady. She felt encouraged, but she was still afraid that there might be something wrong with her precious bit of paper. It might not, after all, be so valuable as a postal order.

'Is it not real money?' she asked.

'It may be, and probably is,' said the manager, 'but I don't know anything about the drawer, and unfortunately I don't know you. Is there any one in Ballynephán who can identify you?'

'Identify' was too much for Bridget and Maureen. They stared blankly at the manager. He explained himself.

'Any one in the town who knows you and could tell me that you really are Maureen Phelim?'

'There's Thomas Geraghty,' said Bridget, 'and it's well he knows Maureen and all about her. Isn't she and Mary Geraghty at school together? Thomas knows that well enough.'

'Do you think you could find him and ask him to call here?'

'I could, of course,' said Bridget, 'only it mightn't be this instant minute. It's selling some bonhams he is, and with the crowd that's in it, it mightn't be too easy. But with the blessing of God I'll have a try.'

No special and unusual blessing was required. Thomas Geraghty, prompted by an uncontrollable curiosity, had followed Bridget into the bank. He could not think what Bridget's business was. When she and Maureen turned from the manager's table they at once saw Geraghty leaning over the counter, to the inconvenience of the cashier and the crowd of men who were trying to cash cheques.

'Thomas Geraghty,' said Bridget, 'will you come here for a minute? There's a gentleman that's wanting to speak to you.'

Geraghty was very willing to do as he was asked. The whole affair was becoming more and more mysterious. His curiosity was becoming acute.

'You're Mr. Geraghty,' said the bank manager. 'Are you prepared to identify this young lady?'

'Young lady' applied to Maureen puzzled Geraghty. The word 'identify' defeated him, as it had defeated Bridget and Maureen. But he felt that it was a great word. It gave solemnity to the occasion. He took off his hat, put his hand on a ledger which lay on the table, and began:

'I swear by Almighty God——'

'I'm not asking you to take an oath,' said the bank manager with a smile. 'All I'm asking you is to tell me if you know this young lady.'

'Is it know Maureen Phelim?' said Geraghty, putting on his hat again. 'I've known her since she was in the

world to know. I know Thaddaeus Phelim that's her Da and as good a man as there is in Connaught. And I know Bridget here that's married on Thady and the mother of Maureen.'

'Thank you,' said the bank manager. 'That's very satisfactory. And now we needn't detain you any more, Mr. Geraghty. I'm sure you're a busy man.'

Geraghty wished very much to linger, but the manager's dismissal was firm and final, as indeed it had to be. It is entirely against banking rules to conduct the business of a client in the presence of an outsider. When Geraghty at last disappeared, the manager again addressed Maureen. 'If you are content to lodge the cheque to your credit I might open a current account for you on the understanding that you don't draw on it till the cheque is cleared.'

All this was totally unintelligible to Bridget or Maureen. The manager realized this and attempted an explanation in words even more difficult to understand than those of the original statement.

Bridget felt it was time to make her position clear.

'What I was wishful for,' she said, 'is to have the money for a fortune for Maureen until such time as she might be getting married. But sure if there's no money in it we'll have to do the best we can without it.'

This simplified matters for the bank manager. He had no objection whatever to receiving the cheque and putting it on deposit receipt. Maureen was plainly very young. It would be ten years or so before she could expect to marry. Meanwhile the money would be there, earning a little money for the bank, and a little, but much less, for Maureen.

'If you leave it with me,' he said, this time avoiding technical language, 'I'll keep it safe for you, and, what's more, I'll add a little to it every year.'

'Will it be mine?' said Maureen.

'It will be yours and nobody else's,' said the manager.

'And will you not give it to any other one?'

'Certainly not.'

'It's on account of her Da she's saying that,' said Bridget, 'as good a man as ever there is within the four seas of Ireland only for his being foolish at times.'

The bank manager thought, mistakenly, that the father of the little girl was an habitual, or at least an occasional, drunkard. 'Foolishness' in the west of Ireland generally means fondness for whisky. This made him determined to keep Maureen's money safe for her.

'Neither your Da nor any one else will be able to get a penny of it,' he said. 'But as soon as you're old enough to have a young man and want to marry him, just come to me. I'll give you your money and a bit more added to it.'

The manager felt safe in this promise. Sir Aylmer's cheque, drawn upon a London bank, looked as if it would be honoured when presented. It seemed almost impossible that Bridget, quite impossible that Maureen, should have forged such a document, or obtained possession of it in any illegal way. In any case, if there was anything wrong with the cheque the deposit receipt could be cancelled.

Bridget and Maureen left the manager's table very well satisfied. In the crowd which was still gathered round the cashier's desk was Geraghty. He inquired whether Bridget had bought the bonham she wanted, and then offered to drive them back in his cart.

IV

'There will be an "I.R.A." meeting to-morrow night at Michael McCarthy's. Important. You are to attend.'

Thaddaeus Phelim received this note without surprise. Such meetings of the organization to which he belonged were often held and were agreeable functions. There was always a great deal of violent talk about the iniquities of England, the criminal obstinacy of Ulster and the devotion of the men of Innishbofin—or at least some

of them—to the cause of Ireland's unity and Ireland's freedom. Nebulous plans for the accomplishment of these great aims were discussed in a thrilling atmosphere of profound secrecy. Thaddaeus Phelim often found opportunity for the recitation of one of his favourite patriotic poems. Once or twice he had sung a verse or two of 'The West's Awake', which has a stirring tune. Thaddaeus enjoyed the meetings, which stimulated and excited him. He did not notice that this time the summons was in an unusual and rather peremptory form.

Michael McCarthy was, as usual, in his place at the head of the table. He always presided at the meetings. Round the room were six other members of the organization, among them Geraghty, who had driven Bridget and Maureen to Ballynephon on the day of the pig fair. All of them were patriots of the sternest kind.

Thaddaeus came into the room with a cheerful greeting to his friends and fellow-conspirators. He was received with silence. Not a greeting responded to his words. Thaddaeus was surprised, and looked round to find nothing but hostile looks. Michael McCarthy broke the silence which was most unusual at such meetings.

'What's this I'm after hearing about you, Thaddaeus Phelim?'

Thaddaeus noticed the use of the longer form of his name, instead of the familiar and friendly Thady. He felt as if he were a criminal charged with some serious offence.

'Hearing about what?' he said.

He was quite unconscious of having done or said anything which could be regarded as wrong, wrong from the point of view of these eager patriots.

'You know what well enough,' said Michael McCarthy. 'But if you don't know, I'll tell you. The money. Fifty pounds and more.'

'Money!' said Thaddaeus, entirely bewildered. 'Fifty pounds! Sure you know well enough that I never

had fifty pounds and it's not likely ever will I. Where would I get fifty pounds, or the half of fifty pounds?'

'Will you speak up, Geraghty, and tell Mr. Thaddaeus Phelim what you seen in the bank at Ballynephan.'

This made things more and more uncomfortable. To be called Thaddaeus was bad enough when he had always before been known as Thady. To be described as Mr. Thaddaeus Phelim was much worse. The 'Mr.' was something more than an indication of formality. It was a sign of actual hostility.

'Thomas Geraghty,' said McCarthy, loudly, as if he were a policeman summoning a witness from the back part of a court of justice.

Geraghty stood up, put his pipe in his pocket, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

'It was the day of the pig fair in Ballynephan, where I was meaning to sell some bonhams that I had in the back of the cart. Seeing Bridget Phelim and Maureen, on this side of the bridge it was, I stopped the cart and proffered them a lift into the town.'

'You always had the name of being a good fellow on the road,' said a young man who was sitting near the door.

'Seeing it was a long way,' said Geraghty, 'and me feeling sorry for the girleen who's a friend of my own Mary.'

'It's a kind heart you have in you, Thomas,' said another man, 'but it's no more than I'd expect of you. The Geraghtys was always kind-hearted.'

'God forgive me,' said Geraghty piously, 'for giving the likes of them ones a lift to anywhere, unless it might be to hell, which is where they'll surely be going in the latter end.'

Thaddaeus, though bewildered and a little frightened, spoke up in defence of his wife.

'You've no call to speak that way about Bridget,' he said, 'seeing that she's one that's always been attentive to her religious duties.'

'Let you be getting on with what you have to tell us,' said McCarthy, 'and not be wasting time over religious duties, either Bridget Phelim's or any other one's.'

Geraghty cleared his throat, turned round and spat into the fire.

'The way of it was this,' he said. 'I was stepping into the bank about some business of my own, and who did I see there but my bold Bridget Phelim and Maureen looking like as if the place belonged to her. Like a queen she was, or maybe worse.'

'I wouldn't doubt her,' said the man who had praised Geraghty's goodness of heart. 'Impudent, that one is.'

'Well,' Geraghty went on, 'it wasn't long before the two of them was taken in behind the counter to where the manager does be sitting. It was like as if they had some mighty important business with him, and that private.'

'And had they?' asked McCarthy, slipping his question into a dramatic pause in Geraghty's narrative.

'It's what I was wondering myself,' said Geraghty, 'when word came that I was wanted by the manager. So in I went. "You're Thomas Geraghty?" says he. "I am," says I. "Tell me now," says he, "do you know that girl standing there fornist you?" It was a young lady he called her, which is what I'd rather not be repeating, it not being true of Maureen or any other like her. "I do," says I. "What would hinder me knowing her? She's Maureen Phelim," says I. "That'll do," says he, "and you can be off out of that, for I'm done with you".'

'It's mighty high and mighty them fellows is,' said the young man who sat near the door.

'So off I went,' said Geraghty, 'but I didn't go before I had a look at the paper that was on the table, the same paper that Maureen had had in her hand.'

'And what was it?' asked McCarthy.

'It was a cheque,' said Geraghty, 'and it was fifty pounds it was for, and the manager took it from her—'

I could see that, for I didn't go too far away. Took it from her the way he'd keep it safe for her in the bank.'

'Mr. Thaddaeus Phelim,' said McCarthy, 'you were asking a while ago what money. Well, now you know. The money Geraghty saw in the bank.'

This direct evidence baffled Thaddaeus. His first impulse was to say that Geraghty was simply a liar. But he hesitated to start what might be a serious, even a dangerous, quarrel with a party of men, all of them at one time his friends, but all of them now evidently hostile to him. He fell back on a feeble line of defence, using almost the same words as he had used before.

'Bridget never had fifty pounds, nor couldn't get it. You know that well enough.'

'It was Maureen,' said Geraghty. 'Didn't I hear her say it was hers, heard it plain as I'm hearing you this minute.'

Thaddaeus was becoming exasperated by this interrogation, though he was not yet prepared for an open quarrel.

'Have some sense, Geraghty,' he said. 'Have sense the whole of you. What's Maureen but a little slip of a girleen? How could she have fifty pounds, or ten pounds, or for the matter of that, one pound? The most she ever had in her life would be sixpence, and I'm doubtful if she ever had that itself.'

'Thaddaeus,' said Michael McCarthy, 'I know well that Bridget couldn't have had that much money, not Maureen either. It was you had the money.'

'I had not.'

'And it was just a stratagem to be sending Maureen to put it in the bank so as no one would know it was yours. But we know more than you think—we know where you got it.'

Innocence is supposed to be a strong defence against accusations of any kind, and Thaddaeus had a perfectly clear conscience. But it did not avail him much. He was bewildered and began to feel more and more frightened.

'I never had fifty pounds,' he said feebly, 'and I couldn't. Not if I was to sell all I have in the world would I have fifty pounds or anything like it.'

'Mr. Thaddaeus Phelim,' said McCarthy—and this time he spoke with the solemnity of a judge passing a heavy sentence—'did you, or did you not, bring me a letter that came to you out of the sea from a German submarine?'

'I did bring you a letter, but it was yourself said it came from the Germans.'

'And didn't that letter say they'd be sending money to us, be the same more or less, money so as we could help them against the English? Money to be spent on winning the liberty of Ireland?'

Thaddaeus remembered the letter. He could hardly have forgotten it. He remembered too the interpretation he and McCarthy together had put on the letter. He could not have forgotten that either. For days he had looked forward to this help from Germany. At night he had sometimes dreamed of it.

'Is that what the letter said, or is it not?' said McCarthy.

Thaddaeus could scarcely deny that he, with McCarthy's help, had taken that to be the meaning of the letter.

'It might then,' he said. 'I'm not denying that it might.'

'So that's where the money came from!' said McCarthy. 'You got it; and what did you do with it? You sent that girl of yours to put it in the bank, so as you could keep it for yourself, the rest of us not knowing.'

'I did not,' said Thaddaeus, 'nor I couldn't, for I never had it. In the name of Almighty God I'll swear that no German ever gave me a penny, either for to encourage the people of Ireland, or for any other reason. And if Bridget put it into the bank—'

'She did,' said Geraghty, 'for I seen her, as plain as I see you this minute. Only it was Maureen done it, not Bridget.'

'Thaddaeus Phelim,' said McCarthy, 'I wouldn't have thought it of you. If there was a man on Innishbofin I trusted, it was you. But there's nobody will ever trust you again. I'll just say this to you and then I'm done with you, and you'll come to this house no more. Without you hand that money over to them it belongs to, to the men that's doing their best for the cause of Ireland, unless you take it out of the bank and hand it over, it'll be the worse for you, and if you go down on your knees and ask for mercy you'll not get it. We're giving you this chance and it's the last you will be given.'

Thaddaeus walked home across the strand. He was a bewildered and sorely stricken man. The threat of complete ostracism was to him a very terrible one. Never again to be able to associate with his friends and fellow-workers in the great cause to which he was devoted, to be branded as a thief and, what was worse, a traitor—all this was intolerable. He knew very well what it meant. Every one in Ireland understands the terrible weapon, invented first by Parnell, which has added the word Boycott to the English language. If he went to the market, no one would buy from him or sell to him. If he entered a shop he would be unable to purchase anything. At mass on Sunday the rest of the congregation would draw away from him, and when he left the chapel people whom he had known all his life would turn their backs on him and walk away. No leper in Biblical Palestine was ever shunned by his fellow-men as the boycotted man is. Indeed the lepers may have been a little the better off. They may have had the solace of pitying looks or kind words spoken, though only from a distance. For Thaddaeus there would be no pity and no kindness.

There might be worse than ostracism. Thaddaeus was no coward. If the Erne was to run red he was quite willing that his blood should be part of the stream. But to die as a traitor, with all the added misery of disgrace, to lie awake at night fearing at every sound that

his hour had come and the avengers were at the door—this he could not bear.

But there was an alternative. The money might be restored. Against his wish and inclination, he began to believe that Geraghty's story might be true. Bridget might have got the money as McCarthy said he had got it. She might have played him false and kept it. The suspicion angered him. Scarcely knowing what he did, he quickened his pace.

Bridget and Maureen were in bed when he reached the cottage. People go to bed early in Innishbofin where there is not much that can be done after nightfall. Thaddaeus roused them. In the dim light of a still glowing turf fire they stood before him on the earthen floor of the cottage.

'Is it truc, Bridget,' said Thaddaeus, 'is it true that you took money to the bank at Ballynephén and put it there unbeknownst to me?'

He asked his question sternly, but there was some sorrow, if no hint of pity, in his voice. He had trusted Bridget. Never in the course of their life together had she deceived him. She had not understood him or shared his dreams and ideals, but she had always been loyal to him. Now—if this were true——

Bridget was not a woman who had ever read a book.

Even if she had been given to reading—a form of foolishness, in her opinion—it is very unlikely that she would have read the Book of Numbers. If she had she would at that moment have realized the truth of that author's minatory saying: 'Be sure your sin will find you out.' She had deceived her husband and now, inexplicably, her sin had come to light.

'Oh Thady, Thady darling,' she wailed, 'don't be looking at me like that. Thady, Thady.'

'So you took the money and brought shame on me.'

'Oh, Thady, Thady, don't be looking that way on me. Me that never did an ill turn to you all these years, no, nor said an ill thing of you, nor thought an ill thought

of you. Never at all. And now— Thady, Thady darling.'

'So you took it. Is that it, Bridget? Tell me.'

She bowed her head, thus mutely making her confession.

Maureen was not as her mother was. Perhaps a child owes less loyalty to a father than a wife to a husband. Perhaps a daughter's loyalty is to both parents, and there are times when a choice between them must be made.

'It was me done it and not her. So if there's any beating to be done, it's me that should be bet.'

Maureen was a pathetic figure standing in the half darkness, her bare feet on the damp floor, wearing her coarse cotton nightdress. But she was a child of spirit and courage, altogether loyal to her mother. Yet her words were unjust, or had an unjust implication. Her father had 'taken the stick to her' (the phrase was his), though his threats came oftener than the beatings. But he had never struck his wife, and no provocation would have induced him to beat her. Maureen was different. Thaddeaus held that a child ought to be beaten and is all the better for it. In this he agreed with Solomon, a king who has a reputation for wisdom, rather than with modern educationalists.

But at this moment Thaddeaus had no thought of beating Maureen. He was a frightened man, cowed and frightened by the half-veiled threats of Michael McCarthy and the others. The one thing of importance to him was to get the money and give it to them who, as he believed, had a right to it.

'If it was you put the money in the bank,' he said to Maureen, 'it's you will take it out again and give it to me.'

'I will not,' said Maureen, 'and no other one will either. The gentleman in the bank said no one, only me, could get it out.'

'It's you will do it then,' said Thaddeaus. 'If you have to walk from here to Dublin to get it, it's from

here to Dublin you'll go, and bring the money back with you.'

'I will not,' said Maureen.

Here Bridget burst in to the dispute.

'Ah, whist now, Maureen, and don't be talking that way and angering him. Sure you know that's no way to be speaking to your Da. And Thady, my darling, will you listen to what I'm telling you, and be said by me? It was for herself that the money came.'

'Out of the sea, like the bottle, that's how it came,' said Thaddaeus. 'That's how it came, and not for Maureen nor for you either.'

'It was not out of the sea, but in a letter from London. It was some high-up gentleman sent it, and it was for Maureen.'

This was an entirely incredible story. No gentleman in London, however high up he might be, would send a large sum of money to a little girl living on a remote island, a child whose very name he could not possibly have heard. It was far more likely that the money had come 'out of the sea', flotsam, like the original bottle.

Bridget went on, speaking rapidly, pleading desperately. Her daughter's whole future was at stake. The fortune, so unexpectedly come by, meant a great marriage for her, a 'match' otherwise unobtainable for a portionless girl.

'It's not hers the money is,' said Thaddaeus. Here his voice rose to a tone of passionate declamation. 'It's Ireland's. Can't you see, woman, it's the cause of Ireland the money's for.'

Bridget had never understood her husband's devotion to his political dream. Never was the difference between them more clear than now. Thaddaeus lived in the past, a past of dreams and glory and greatness—a past somehow, somewhere, to become real again. Bridget, a realist and no poet, lived for a future, Maureen's future, in which there would be a husband, a home, children, prosperity, or what would seem prosperity on Innishbofin.

She could not realize her husband's hopes. He counted hers as little things, to be reckoned as dross beside the splendour of his dreams.

But Thaddaeus, poet, patriot, dreamer, was also an Irish peasant, and he, like others of his race, lived in fear—fear of his fellows, of their hatred and contempt, and, worse still, of what might come on him as a consequence of that hatred and contempt.

'It's her you're thinking of, not me,' he said, 'me that's your husband, and has worked for you and earned for you. What will be coming to me if that money's gone and I don't give it to them?'

The 'them'—vague word—had a meaning plain enough to Bridget. There were stories whispered by the firesides of Irish cottages of the fate of men counted as traitors. Bridget shuddered.

'Maureen, Maureen,' she said. 'Do you hear what your Da is saying? Wouldn't it be better——?'

'It would not be better.'

Maureen knew nothing of the darker side of Irish patriotism. As a child such knowledge had been withheld from her and the whispered stories had not reached her ears.

'What might they be doing to your Da?' said Bridget. 'Will you think of that, Maureen?'

'They'll be doing nothing at all,' said Maureen, 'for they wouldn't be let. The gentleman in London would hinder them. He's a high-up man.'

Bridget knew and Thaddeaus knew what Maureen did not. Gentlemen in London, however high up, have very little to do with what happens in Ireland, whether by way of helping or hindering. Nor do gentlemen in London, especially if they are 'high up', very much care.

Thaddaeus sat down on his narrow stone seat in the chimney corner, a despairing and bewildered man. His wife had been false to him. So he still thought, in spite of all she had said. His daughter had defeated him and he realized that no threat would move her. His friends

had deserted and condemned him, judging him to be a traitor to their cause and his. There was nothing left for him in life, if indeed life itself was to go on. He shuddered at the thought that it might end suddenly. He sat staring at the faintly glowing ashes of the fire.

Bridget went to him. She laid a hand on his shoulder. She stroked his hair, thin hair that was turning grey. There was no response. She raked the ashes of the fire together, put on fresh sods of turf and blew them to a blaze. There was no word or movement from her husband. She lit the smoky little lamp and hung it on the wall behind his shoulder. She took down Mitchell's 'Jail Journal' and laid it on his knee. It slid to the ground and lay among the ashes. Thaddaeus gave no sign of consciousness. Bridget, with a sigh, turned from him.

Maureen was still standing where she had been since her father roused her.

'Let you be going to your bed, Maureen,' she said. 'Maybe to-morrow in the daylight we'll see what's best to be doing.'

Maureen, docile at last, obeyed her.

Bridget, shivering slightly, went to bed, too.

PART VII

LONDON

I

SIR AYLMER sat in his room at the Ministry of Co-Ordination. He was a worried, a deeply worried man. The usual troubles of his official life did not as a rule disturb his peace of mind to any serious degree. He was accustomed to them. One board or another was always refusing to be co-ordinated, insisting on going its own way without considering the activities of a neighbouring ministry. The result was the kind of deadlock which follows a railway collision. The line of traffic is blocked and no advance can be made in either direction. Every one remained perfectly polite. It is one of the most cherished traditions of the Civil Service that there must be no loss of temper whatever happens. Notes were interchanged, minutes were quoted, references were made to regulations, and a tangle resulted, which it was the business of Sir Aylmer to disentangle.

All this was part of an ordinary day's work for Sir Aylmer and he was an adept at the game of cat's cradle, once popular with children. So long as only two or three departments were involved, Sir Aylmer remained imperturbable. But lately, owing to a pressure of public opinion outside official circles—a thing greatly to be deprecated—twenty or thirty boards, ministries and minor controls had got mixed up together. No man, however skilful, can play cat's cradle with a large number of bits of string at the same time. Sir Aylmer was worried.

But that was not the only or even the worst of his troubles. His political chief, the nominal head of the Ministry of Co-Ordination, was a man of considerable ambition who looked forward to achieving Cabinet rank. For years Sir Aylmer had watched over this man, kindly

but firmly, much as a nurse cares for the child in her charge. Without harshness, and always by persuasion rather than force, she prevents the child from throwing itself into the Serpentine during morning walks in Hyde Park. Unfortunately Sir Aylmer's man, escaping for a day from tutelage, had made an amazingly injudicious speech at a public meeting. Loyalty to his political chief is the first duty of a civil servant. Sir Aylmer found himself obliged to support the statements in the speech, at the same time sterilizing them so that no real harm was done. It was a very difficult job, and cost Sir Aylmer much anxious thought.

Then, as if that were not enough, there was a minor trouble. A fuzzy-headed girl in his office had made what her immediate superior called a "bloomer". She had recently been foisted into his office from a university, adorned with a B.A. degree. It was an honour degree, won by her knowledge of history. Let loose in a minor administrative post, she had, without consulting any one, sent off to a Mr. Tompkins what is known as a 'stock letter.' Hundreds of these letters are dispatched every day to foolish members of the general public who want to get things done—impossible things, or things which, though possible, would create trouble. They are scrupulously polite letters. Some people even find them sympathetic. But they all, or almost all, say that 'owing to the shipping shortage . . .' There is also a variant, occasionally used, equally polite, but making no mention of shipping. It says: 'for security reasons . . .'

The girl—Sir Aylmer distinctly remembered the fuzziness of her hair—had sent one of these letters, a 'shortage of shipping' one, to Mr. Tompkins, who had written to ask whether a place, with an adequate salary, could be found for his niece in the Ministry. The mention of the shortage of shipping exasperated him to such an extent that he appealed to his member of Parliament, who promised to ask a question in the House of Commons—not about the shortage of shipping (no one would have

minded that), but about the way business was conducted in the Ministry of Co-Ordination. Sir Aylmer, like all civil servants, particularly disliked questions in Parliament, called familiarly P.Q.s in his office. He would have liked to scalp the fuzzy-headed girl—her hair invited some such action—but he knew that there would be more P.Q.s, a whole flight of them, if he did that.

This was difficult, for the Member of Parliament was an unimportant man, who welcomed Mr. Tompkins' question as an opportunity for emerging out of obscurity into the limelight, a thing he had long wished to do, and now was disinclined to surrender his chance.

Meanwhile, Mr. Tompkins himself wrote offensive letters to the Ministry of Co-Ordination, all of which reached Sir Aylmer in due time.

'My niece lives with me in my house in Smith Square, and even the Ministry of Information ought to realize that for purposes of transport to your office a ship is unnecessary.

'If you had said that owing to the shortage of buses, your position would be intelligible, but ships . . .'

Sir Aylmer did not mind these letters in the least. No civil servant does. It is generally recognized that the public has certain rights, and among them the right to fire off sarcasms, sometimes in letters direct to offices, sometimes in letters to newspapers. Often the letters are really funny, funny enough to find a place in the pages of *Punch*. Sir Aylmer enjoys them as much as the writers do. What he does not like is a question in Parliament. It is not that these questions do any harm or good. But answers must be provided for the ministers to give. This involves Sir Aylmer's staff in a great deal of tiresome work. There is nothing more irritating and exhausting than searching for lost files which, even if found, may not contain the information wanted.

In the case of the fuzzy-headed girl's mistake with the stock letter, no files, even if not lost, were likely to supply matter of any use in providing a satisfactory answer.

Sir Aylmer felt that he would have to fall back on a refuge for the destitute, already so worn with constant use that it hardly evoked the faintest applause in Parliament even from the government's warmest supporters. It is always possible for a minister to refuse to answer at all on the grounds that he—and, no doubt, the questioner—prefer to keep Hitler guessing. This, in the case of Mr. Tompkins' niece who wanted a job in the Ministry, was scarcely satisfactory. It would no doubt shut the mouth of the aggrieved uncle, but Sir Aylmer did not like it. The proper thing to do was to send the fuzzy-haired girl back to Oxford, install Mr. Tompkins' niece in the vacant place, and let her take a turn at sending stock letters to the wrong people. That is what he would have done if he had his own way. But no one in this world has his own way unless he is a dictator, and even then not for long.

But none of these official worries, nor all of them together, would have reduced Sir Aylmer to the state of dejection in which he was. There were private troubles as well. His banker no longer suspected him of holding shares in the Eastern Lands Security Investment Company. He knew perfectly well that Sir Aylmer did not hold and never had held anything of the kind. But, goaded by the Bank of England, he kept on asking whether any friend of Sir Aylmer's did. This was sufficiently unpleasant, but not nearly so bad as the proceedings of Captain Hillary of the Naval Secret Service. It seemed impossible to clear himself completely of the suspicion of providing money for the maintenance of German submarine crews calling at bays and islands in the neutral part of Ireland. There had been no threat of actual prosecution, perhaps because the prosecution of a man in Sir Aylmer's position would need strong proof behind it, and proof was unobtainable. But if Sir Aylmer himself could not be implicated in treasonable action, Captain Hillary felt sure that Thaddaeus Phelim was, and he wanted to find out all he could about this rebel Irishman. Sir Aylmer could give him no information at

all, and said so repeatedly. But Captain Hillary was convinced that no one would send a cheque for fifty pounds to a man he knew nothing about and with whom he had never had any dealings. This was a reasonable position, and Sir Aylmer made things no better by saying the cheque was not sent to Thaddaeus but to Maureen, presumably his daughter. Pressed by Captain Hillary, he had to confess that he knew no more about the daughter than he did about the father. This merely increased Captain Hillary's suspicions. At last, driven to desperation, Sir Aylmer told the whole story of Elsie's bottle, its discovery by Maureen on the shores of Innishbofin, and Van Rennan's cheque. This confession was received politely but with complete incredulity. It was not the kind of story that any one could believe. The only result of telling it was that the mention of Van Rennan's name reawakened the suspicions of the Bank of England which had begun to die down. Van Rennan's name was very well known in financial circles and his connexion with the Eastern Lands Security Investment Company was no secret. The whole business became more and more complex and, though a man in Sir Aylmer's position is accustomed to complications, he was beginning to feel that his mind and his temper were being overstrained and that one or other would soon give way. Either he would find himself in an asylum or he would break out suddenly and tell everybody, in appropriately strong language, exactly what he thought of them.

II

There was a tap at the door. Sir Aylmer said 'Come in' most unwillingly. To a man in his state of perplexity and despondency no visitor would have been welcome. Even an angel—had such a creature visited the Ministry of Co-Ordination, a most unlikely thing for an angel to do—would have further irritated him.

In response to his 'Come in', Miss Peskill, his personal

secretary, entered the room with a letter in her hand. She was not an angel, but was, perhaps, the next best thing. She was a supremely competent young woman. Never once in all the years she had served Sir Aylmer had she made a mistake, lost a paper or failed to remind Sir Aylmer of an engagement. But he was not glad to see her. To a man conscious of having got into a number of tangles from which he could not get out, the sight of any one so perfect as Miss Peskill was an intolerable irritation. It was difficult to imagine her in any kind of muddle, quite impossible to think of her in a situation from which she could not immediately emerge without so much as ruffling her smooth and tidy hair. Sir Aylmer frowned.

Miss Peskill laid the letter she carried on his table.

'A personal letter, I think,' she said. 'The Registry thought it better not to open it. They passed it on to me. It appears to be a private, not an official letter.'

Sir Aylmer glanced at the envelope which bore a pale green Irish stamp and was addressed in an unformed childish writing. It certainly did not look like the letters which usually came to the Ministry.

'Thank you, Miss Peskill,' said Sir Aylmer. 'And—and I shall be very busy this morning, so——' He hesitated.

Miss Peskill was aware that he was not busy or the least likely to be. He could not be busy without her knowing all about what he was doing. But—among her other virtues she was tactful—she did not show by so much as the quiver of an eyelash what she thought of this busyness.

'So keep people off as well as you can. You must use your own discretion about telephone calls. But head off that man Billing. I really cannot deal with him. Refer him to the Board of Trade if he becomes insistent.'

'Or perhaps the Ministry of Supply,' said Miss Peskill. 'We put him on to the Board of Trade last time he was here. It seems scarcely fair——'

'Or the housing people,' said Sir Aylmer. 'Anyhow,

I won't have him set on me this morning. You know all about him and can deal with the matter just as well as I can.'

Miss Peskill did know all about the unfortunate Mr. Billing. He was a perfectly innocent manufacturer who made cartridge cases. He would have been quite content to go on making them as long as the war lasted, if he had not received a peremptory order to stop work on cartridge cases and turn his attention to sewing machines. The whole world, it appeared, was shrieking for sewing machines and an abundant supply of them would save British export trade from destruction and restore her position in the world market. Mr. Billing, a mild and amenable man, was quite willing to make sewing machines, but wanted material to make them of. Here he came up against the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Supply, who refused to give him enough steel to make a single needle until his design for sewing machines was approved by the Ministry of Housing. That Ministry pointed out that as the machines were meant for export—reference to the original order—and they only built, or planned to build, houses in England, Mr. Billing ought to go back to the Board of Trade. To make their position still clearer they added that a sewing machine was no use to a woman until she had a house in which to sew, and that, though straining every nerve, they had so far failed to build a house.

All this Miss Peskill understood. Her own opinion was that the *affaire Billing* offered a glorious opportunity for co-ordinating three recalcitrant ministries. Now that Sir Aylmer had given her a free hand, she made up her mind to have a try. Sure of her own competence, she enjoyed complications of this kind.

Sir Aylmer opened the letter with the Irish stamp on it as soon as Miss Peskill had left the room. The school-girl writing, large and sprawly, was easy enough to read. The meaning was not so easy to understand.

'Your Honour's Lordship.' So Maureen's letter began,

remembering what her mother, quoting her aunt, had told her about the proper way of addressing people in high positions. Then, not feeling quite satisfied with that, she had crossed it out and substituted: 'Your Lordship's Honour.'

Maureen, who seemed to be writing under strong emotion, had evidently forgotten what had been taught her in school about the proper way of addressing an Irish letter. There was no '*A chara deelish*'. She went straight to the point.

'I'm after hearing,' she wrote, 'that them ones are out to kill my Da, on account of your postal order your honour sent me. And my Ma is terrible troubled though it was her bid me put it in the bank which my Da said was wrong on account of it not being for me which was what your Honour's Lordship said it was. So will your Honour please tell them not to kill my Da, Mr. Michael McCarthy being the worst of them, the same that is the schoolmaster and a terrible hard man who doesn't care what any one might do whether it might be God or the Civic Guard though he'd be said by your Lordship's Honour you that's a high up man with all the money in the world. So will you please say he's not to.'

'Your loving friend,

MAUREEN PHELM.'

Sir Aylmer knew at once who the writer was. He had heard enough about the Phelims of late to impress the name on his memory. He had himself said enough about Maureen to remember her. What puzzled him about the letter was the suggestion that some one, Michael McCarthy or some one else, intended to murder Thaddaeus Phelim, apparently for the sake of the fifty pounds which he had sent to Maureen. Sir Aylmer, an Irishman himself, knew that in Ireland people murder each other just as they do in England and elsewhere. But in England the desire to obtain money is the commonest, perhaps the only, motive for murder. In Ireland murders are seldom com-

mitted for the sake of gain. The Irish are much less sordid in their assassinations than the English. They murder chiefly for exalted motives, such as difference of political opinions or ideal patriotism.

This knowledge of the ways of his countrymen left Sir Aylmer wondering why the life of Thaddaeus Phelim was threatened as Maureen evidently thought it was. The man, so the Naval Intelligence people thought, was a patriot of the purest and most uncompromising kind, in touch with German submarines and eager to injure England in any way he could. It is not for holding such opinions that Irishmen are usually murdered. They may occasionally be shot by whatever party calls itself the government at the moment, but that is execution, an entirely different thing from what the Irish bishops, assembled in council at Maynooth, once condemned as 'unauthorized murder'. It was evidently unauthorized murder which Maureen feared for her father. Her mention of Michael McCarthy, whoever he was, and her vague reference to 'they' and 'them', showed that she was not thinking of any regularly constituted courts of justice. Her appeal to him and her confidence in his authority made Sir Aylmer most uncomfortable. He was willing to do anything in his power to help Maureen in her distress and save her father's life; but there did not seem anything he could do. If, as Maureen thought, neither God nor the Civic Guard could restrain Michael McCarthy, there did not seem much chance of a mere civil servant doing anything effective.

Sir Aylmer sat trying to find some way out of the difficulty or, if that was not possible, at least to discover what the difficulty was. Then his telephone bell rang. His first impulse was to curse Miss Peskill for allowing any one to disturb him. But Sir Aylmer was a just man and he knew Miss Peskill. That immaculate secretary would not have put a telephone call through to him unless it were about something of very great importance. It was possible that the persistent and ill-used Mr. Billing had

got the better of Miss Peskill and succeeded in getting through to Sir Aylmer. But this seemed unlikely. No one ever had got the better of Miss Peskill. It was more likely that some one of great importance was demanding a personal interview with him. Miss Peskill might not have been able to withstand a President, a Chief Controller or a Cabinet Minister. But it might be something even worse than that. The telephone bell continued to ring in that minatory manner which those bells find it all too easy to adopt. It might be that some other girl, not the fuzzy-headed one, might have sent a stock letter, this time a 'reasons of security' one, to the Prime Minister or the King. It was not likely that this had happened, but in his present mood Sir Aylmer regarded the girls on the administrative side of his office as capable of anything, and he began to think of stock letters as a kind of flying bomb, shot off unaimed and liable to explode anywhere. He frowned and picked up the receiver. Almost at once the frown smoothed away from his forehead. He recognized the voice on the telephone.

'Van Rennan? Is it Van Rennan? My dear fellow, how delightful! What brings you to London? Business? Well, it could hardly be pleasure. No one but a lunatic would come to London for pleasure now-a-days. Lunch? Yes, I'm free for lunch. At your hotel? Now. Straight away. It's a bit early, but I can manage, and anyhow if we're not early there'll be nothing left to eat. How did you leave Elsie? Good. And Mrs. Van Rennan? Busy? Well, every one is these days. You say she enjoys it. I daresay. Most women do.'

Lunch was served in the sitting-room of Van Rennan's suite. There was, in spite of regulations and controls, plenty to eat, and the food was good. A really skilled cook can make an excellent dish out of materials which in the hands of the ordinary housewife turn into either leather or mud. It is a matter which has not received the attention it deserves at the Food Ministry. Its praiseworthy desire is to equalize the food of the whole nation

so that the rich have no advantage over the poor. To achieve this aim it has relied on rationing. But the mere rationing of the raw materials of dinner is not enough. Those rich enough to hire good cooks still have an enormous and most unfair advantage over those who have to rely on the ordinary wife or housekeeper. To achieve a true equality it is not enough to ration meat, butter, eggs, and so on. The proper and only effective thing is to kill, exile or imprison all good cooks. The alternative, to make good cooks out of bad ones, is plainly impossible. Therefore, except by a Herod-like purge of those who can cook, true equality cannot be achieved. Hitherto the Food Controllers, being humane and opposed to the death penalty except for the gravest offenders, have shrunk from this. The rich still have a great advantage over the poor and true equality is not achieved. This state of things cannot continue for much longer. The voice of the people, the true gods of the democratic state, will rise in loud and louder protest. It will become necessary, for reasons of security, to exterminate the good cooks. One by one, or in groups of three or four, they will go to the gallows amid the loud plaudits of the multitude. Real equality will be at last achieved. Rich and poor alike will feed on tepid, tasteless soup, slimy corpses of what once were potatoes, and meat tougher than even the most loyal butcher meant it to be.

Over the graves of the slaughtered cooks, gourmets, banded together in what must necessarily be secret societies, will erect memorial stones bearing this inscription :
' Here lies one who died lest living men should live well.'
The epitaph of the martyrs of gastronomy.

III

The luncheon was more than good. It was excellent, and, though neither of the two men considered this point, must have been very expensive. There is indeed a law that no one can spend more than five shillings on a meal,

another of the various efforts to establish equality between the rich and the poor. But every hotel and restaurant of any standing knows how to dodge this law. In the case of meals served in the private rooms of suites, there is no need of dodging. The law is simply ignored.

Van Rennan was not a man who did things by halves. The wine was as good as the food. Being an American, Van Rennan knew little or nothing about wine, but he got what he thought he ought to have by consulting the waiter and leaving him a free hand in the matter of price.

Sir Aylmer had not enjoyed so good a meal for a long time. The Minerva, ever since the beginning of the war, had reduced its menu-card to very unattractive things, and more than doubled the price of the few bottles of wine it still possessed. By the time the waiter had served coffee and brandy, Sir Aylmer had emerged from his mood of despondency and come to regard his troubles as less serious than they appeared earlier in the day.

'And now,' he said, when the waiter had left the room, 'tell me what brings you to London. You said business. If it isn't a dead secret it would interest me to hear what business.'

'Oh, there's nothing secret about it. If I can run the deal through it will be in all the papers in a few days. Ships. You Britishers appear to be a bit short of ships. Well, we've been making ships over our side. I've been making them myself. Every darned factory I control has been turned on to ships. They're made in bits here and there all over the country and assembled at some seaport. There's no end to the number of ships that can be made in this way. I have hundreds myself, and can make as many more. I'm quite ready to supply you Britishers with all you ask for, on easy terms too! That's what I've come to London to arrange.'

'I see,' said Sir Aylmer, a little doubtfully.

Van Rennan noticed the tone in which his friend spoke, and met what he supposed caused the doubt with perfect frankness.

'I don't say they're good ships,' he said. 'They're not. But we calculate that they'll last out the war. After that we'll give them a coat of paint and auction them off to Wops and Dagos. There'll be little or no loss and you'll have had the ships just when you need them. It doesn't matter if they drop to pieces afterwards. Good idea, isn't it?'

Sir Aylmer thought it a very good idea indeed, but he was not prepared to give it his whole-hearted approval.

'You told me a minute ago,' he said, 'that this shipping deal of yours would be in all the papers in a few days if you carry it through, as no doubt you will. If you don't mind my saying so, it would be better not to publish the fact you're supplying ships. I mean, advertise it too much.'

'But why the hell? I'm not out for advertisement. Don't think that. But why shouldn't your public have a bit of good news now and then? Anyhow, I don't see how the newspapers can be prevented from splashing it.'

'Oh, a hint from the Ministry of Information will stop that.'

'But why? That's what I don't see. Why not let people know?'

'Because,' said Sir Aylmer, 'the shipping shortage is our chief, indeed our only reliable line of defence against the public which is always asking for things it is better without. The English are a maritime people, Van Rennan. They'll put up with any privation as long as they believe it is caused by the shortage of ships. But if they once find out that you are supplying unlimited numbers of ships, they'll begin to clamour. They might even riot. It's possible there'd be a revolution headed by stockingless women, who are content enough to go barelegged as long as they think there are no ships.'

'I see that,' said Van Rennan. 'But why the devil not let them have stockings if I'm ready to supply the ships?'

'In my office,' said Sir Aylmer, in the patient tone of an amiable schoolmistress explaining something simple to a dull child, 'in my office at this moment there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of what we call stock letters sent out to people who ask for things, all of them giving the shortage of shipping as the reason they can't have what they want. Take the question of paper, for instance. People are always asking for paper to wrap up parcels with, to make into envelopes for their letters, even to print books on.'

'But surely you could give the book people the paper you are now using to tell them they can't have any? Don't you want books?'

'It's not quite so simple as that,' said Sir Aylmer. 'We've no kind of objection to books. We rather like them. But books are one thing. Publishers and booksellers are another. You'll hardly believe it, Van Rennan, but these people, the publishers and booksellers, actually stood out against us when we wanted to put the purchase tax on their goods, which is put on everything else. What's more, they carried their point and defeated us. Well, we can't have that sort of thing. People must learn they can't kick against us with impunity. They now know that it would have paid them better to have submitted to the purchase tax rather than go without paper.'

This explanation of the treatment of publishers had only that moment occurred to Sir Aylmer. It had no foundation in actual fact. The whole controversy about the purchase tax on books had long ago faded from memory, and in any case those who invent controls and shortages are not vindictive. A good bureaucrat is too cool headed and too far removed from human passion to indulge in a vendetta. But to Sir Aylmer's perverse Irish mind it seemed an amusing thing to say. Van Rennan often boasted about the corruption of American politics. It was pleasant to show him that English politics could be equally corrupt.

Van Rennan may perhaps have believed Sir Aylmer's explanation of the shortage of books. It is more likely that he did not; but in mere politeness to his guest he pretended that he did.

'But all this must be very boring for you. Our internal politics can't possibly interest an American. Go on telling me about your ships.'

'Well, I turned on the whole Eastern Lands Security Investment organization to making ships. And ELSI is a pretty big thing. Before the war it was a great international affair.'

'I know that,' said Sir Aylmer, a little sadly. The mention of ELSI reminded him of his trouble with the Bank of England. He told this melancholy story to Van Rennan.

'I never in my life held one of your shares,' he said, 'but the Bank of England thought I did, on account of that cheque you sent me which they suspect of being a dividend warrant.'

The story was a long one and somewhat complicated. It led up to the point when Sir Aylmer, having cleared himself of the original charge, was suspected of holding the shares in trust for some one else, possibly Maureen Phelim.

'I'll settle that for you,' said Van Rennan. 'It won't be the least trouble.'

'As a matter of fact,' said Sir Aylmer, 'the whole thing is blowing over. So I needn't bother you about it.'

Van Rennan apparently liked being bothered. Financial complications of any kind had a fascination for him.

'What I'll do,' he said, 'is this. I'll make out a packet of shares to you. I have more than I want and can easily spare a few. I'll have them registered in your name. Then you can go to your bank or whoever it is that's worrying you and hand them over. All you've got to say is that you quite forgot you had them. Found them at the back of a drawer you hadn't opened for years. Believe me, if they really want the dollars they can't be

too anxious to investigate where they came from. Those financial sleuths of yours would think that they'd been on the right track all along, which would gratify them immensely. They'd eat out of your hand afterwards and there'd be no more trouble.'

It was a kindly offer, but Sir Aylmer shrank from accepting it. Having almost convinced the Bank of England—so he believed—that he possessed no ELSI shares, there might be a certain awkwardness in coming forward with a whole packet of them in his hand, and offering them, as good patriots should, to the Government.

'But I'll tell you what you might do for me, if you will,' he said. 'You'll be mixed up with the Admiralty, won't you?'

'Yes. Ships. Admiralty, of course.'

'Well, you might drop them a hint that I'm not paying over money to Irish rebels to subsidize German submarines. They've got it into their heads that I am.'

'That you're not doing what?' said Van Rennan.

'Just what I say. The whole thing begins with that money that you sent on from Elsie to the little Irish girl. Well——'

He told in some detail the story which had been unearthed by the Naval Secret Service agent, and how he had fallen under suspicion and was, he believed, still a suspect. Van Rennan opened his eyes wide as the tale went on.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I never thought much of the intelligence of you Britishers, but this is just plain crazy.'

'Very unpleasant,' said Sir Aylmer, 'and tiresome. But I wouldn't say crazy. There's no doubt that the girl's father is a rabid rebel, and when I sent money to the girl it was natural enough to think I meant it for him.'

'I'll put a stop to that right away.'

'A hint, a mere hint, would be enough. Or perhaps you might tell them the story of how the money came to be sent.' They'll believe you, though they're very distrustful about me.'

'I'll tell them,' said Van Rennan, 'that they'll get no ships from us unless they——'

'For God's sake,' said Sir Aylmer, 'don't try to threaten the Admiralty. It'll have no effect except to put their backs up. You might just as well say you'd fight the Navy.'

'Well,' said Van Rennan, 'I reckon we could do that too if we wanted to. But it's the Germans we're out for just now, not you.'

'I think perhaps you'd better say nothing at all,' said Sir Aylmer, now thoroughly uncomfortable. 'Let the whole thing drop. It isn't of any real importance.'

'If you feel that way——'

'I do,' said Sir Aylmer. 'I really do.'

'Then I won't do any more than drop a perfectly polite hint. If that suits you it will suit me too. I'm out to sell those ships, lease lend or any other way. I've built them, and I don't deny that E.L.S.I. has plunged pretty heavily. I'm quite ready to give your Admiralty a kick in the pants if that would be any satisfaction to you, but——'

'It wouldn't. It really wouldn't.'

'—but I'd rather sell my ships. Anyhow, you needn't be the least nervous. Your Admiralty has far too much sense to start getting fresh with me. They know perfectly well that if they want my ships they've got to be civil to me.'

This, as Sir Aylmer knew, was perfectly true. Not only the Admiralty but everyone in England felt it necessary to be civil to Van Rennan. Apart altogether from the ships he had built, he was a man of great importance. A leader of the Republican party and at the same time a strong supporter of England, he was worth cultivating for the sake of the influence he had in his own country.

IV

'It's very extraordinary,' said Van Rennan thoughtfully, 'what a lot of trouble comes out of a thing which

really doesn't matter a damn. Here you are persecuted by bankers——'

'I'd hardly say persecuted,' said Sir Aylmer. 'A little annoyed perhaps. Nothing more.'

'—and liable to be shot as a spy at any moment, all because one little girl gives a birthday present to another. Astonishing, isn't it?'

There really was not the slightest chance of any one shooting or wanting to shoot Sir Aylmer. Even the most earnest intelligence officer would not go as far as that. But the mention of shooting reminded Sir Aylmer of the letter he had been reading when Van Rennan's telephone call summoned him to the excellent lunch which he had just finished. It was the letter from Innishbofin, written by Maureen. It was quite unconnected with the work of the Ministry of Co-Ordination and he had slipped it into his pocket when he left the office, fearing that if it was left on his desk it might fall into the hands of the fuzzy-headed girl. It was impossible to guess what reply she would send to a letter she could not understand, which puzzled even Sir Aylmer himself. Even Miss Peskill might be at a loss in dealing with a document of the kind. But she was a young woman who knew her business and had immense experience of the traditions of the civil service. She would almost certainly pass on the letter to some one else, and Sir Aylmer foresaw almost endless trouble if that were done. To whom would she be likely to send it? Since the subject was partly money and partly killing, which is the essence of war, she might choose the Ministry of Economic Warfare, or, as a second choice, the Criminal Investigation Department, for it looked very much as if a crime were contemplated. Or, if Miss Peskill reasoned out her actions carefully, to the Home Secretary in the hope that he would immediately incarcerate Mr. Michael McCarthy under the provisions of Section 18B.

Sir Aylmer pulled Maureen's letter out of his pocket and handed it to Van Rennan.

'I'm afraid,' he said, 'that I haven't told you the worst of this wretched business yet. Just read that.'

Van Rennan took the letter and read it through twice, the second time with some care.

'Elsie's little friend, I suppose,' he said. 'Her name was Maureen and she lived on an island. Seems to me some one is planning to bump her off her poppa. That's what she means by Da, isn't it?'

'That's it. What I should call her father, but perhaps that's rather pedantic.'

'That so? Well, I've always heard that you Irish are pretty handy with your guns, but what beats me is why any one would take another citizen for a ride for the sake of fifty pounds. Seems rather inadequate. Our gangsters—and I'm not denying that we have a few over our side—wouldn't do it for double the money, and if there were several of them in the game they'd expect that much each.'

Sir Aylmer explained to his friend that in Ireland murders are not committed for the sake of gain. Van Rennan expressed the utmost astonishment.

'If it's not for money,' he asked, 'what do you do it for?'

'Politics.'

'Well, you have me beat,' said Van Rennan. 'We take our politics seriously round about presidential election time. Bands and banners and speeches. For downright cold drawn malignity our speeches would be hard to beat, but I never heard of any one shooting an orator. We respect them, as we respect any man who's earning his keep honestly or dishonestly, so long as he works for it. But we don't even kidnap a child without seeing our way to making some money out of it.'

'That may be so in America,' said Sir Aylmer. 'But you may take my word for it that if Maureen's father is murdered it will be on account of his politics.'

Van Rennan thought this over.

'But this man Phelim,' he said, 'is out and out on the side of the Germans. What we call an isolationist.'

That's so, isn't it? Your Naval Intelligence crowd seem dead sure of that. Seems to me that if any one wants to murder him it must be the British Navy.'

'Certainly not,' said Sir Aylmer. 'That's not the sort of thing the British Navy ever does. You can't imagine an admiral going off with a revolver——'

'But you said it was politics at the back of it, though I can't help feeling there's money in it somewhere, in spite of all you say about the lofty principles of the Irish. And I'd say myself that, even in Ireland, politics and money are a good deal mixed up. My experience is either a man wants to keep what he's got or get what he hasn't, and that's politics, all the world over.'

'You may be right,' said Sir Aylmer. 'But I still think that it's politics, not money, that's at the bottom of this threat to murder Maureen's father.'

'I'm prepared to lay a bet,' said Van Rennan, 'that when I get over there——'

'Over where?'

'This place Innishbofin or whatever it's called.'

'Do you mean that you're going there yourself?'

'Of course I am. We can't have Maureen's poppa bumped off on account of the present Elsie sent to that little girl. And as I was saying, I'm prepared to bet that, even if money isn't at the back of the threat, money will put an end to it. Money can do most things.'

'Not in Irish politics. If you go mixing yourself up in a business like this, the thing you're most likely to put an end to is yourself. You'll get a bullet into you if you try to interfere with McCarthy or Phelim, whatever their quarrel is about.'

'I'll take my chance of that. I'll see to it that I'm not shot either by Maureen's poppa or that egregious ruffian McCarthy. A man who's been in public life and in big business in America knows how to look after himself. Just you get me a permit to go to Ireland. I suppose that's wanted. A man can't pull on his pants in this country without getting a license from some one. And

just you get that permit right now. There's no time to waste. I want to be there before the gunning starts.'

Sir Aylmer sighed. He did not like Van Rennan's plan of going over to Ireland. There were his shipping negotiations to be concluded, and these were of immense importance. If Van Rennan mixed himself up with Irish rebels he would forfeit the confidence of the Admiralty, however innocent his intentions might be. Indeed he might even become an object of suspicion and get into the kind of trouble which follows doubtful action in wartime. It was quite possible, even likely, that he would be shot either by McCarthy or Phelim while trying to compose a quarrel which he did not understand. Every peacemaker, since the days of Mercutio, and no doubt before his time, has run this risk. And a permit to go to Ireland is a very difficult thing to get, impossible for most people, difficult even for a man in Sir Aylmer's position. The authorities have devised a most ingenious system for blocking the way of applicants. The man who actually issues, or is supposed to issue, the permit, says he cannot do so until he has evidence that a passage on the steamer has been secured. The steamer people have a rule that they cannot book passages until the permit to travel has been obtained. To get out of the position thus created takes time. It can hardly be done under three weeks. And Van Rennan was in a hurry. He made that plain.

'So just you hustle round,' he said.

No one dislikes being hustled more than a man in an official position. He regards any attempt to hustle him as an affront to his dignity, and the less dignity his position entitles him to the more he resents the affront and the more obstructive he becomes. Fortunately, Sir Aylmer, being Irish, was not obsessed with a sense of his official dignity. Fortunately also his great knowledge of the rules of procedure enabled him to find ways through and round them. In the case of Elsie's exit permit he had accomplished the impossible. He managed it again, and secured Van Rennan's permit in less than twenty-four hours.

PART VIII

DUBLIN

I

IT HAS been recorded, even emphasized, perhaps in the opinion of impatient readers even over emphasized, that Mr. Van Rennan is a very successful business man and influential in the great game of American politics. A man cannot attain such two-fold eminence without possessing certain qualities. He must have great force of character. He must be courageous. He must be patient in time of adversity and able to face a set-back—for such things happen to all—without despondency or loss of temper. He must learn, like St. Paul, to suffer gladly both fools and the incompetent, if indeed folly and incompetence are not the same thing. All these qualities Mr. Van Rennan possessed in the highest degree. He had need of them when he set off on his journey to Innishbofin. It is doubtful whether in the course of a long and adventurous career he had ever needed them more.

He failed to obtain a seat in the Irish mail train which leaves Euston at an early hour. Misfortunes, as is well known, are harder to bear early in the morning than later in the day. He had to face the prospect of standing in the corridor during the whole of the long journey to Holyhead. This, of course, is the common fate of travellers in war time. Mr. Van Rennan neither grumbled nor cursed. The train, taking advantage of the existence of the war, indulged in a dawdle, and managed to be three hours late when it reached Holyhead. Mr. Van Rennan was unperturbed. He did indeed mention, in a perfectly good-humoured way, that in America when an important train is late, the railway company returns to the passengers a certain amount of the fares they have paid, a dollar or so for each hour's delay. This

statement was received with a grunt of incredulity by Van Rennan's fellow-passenger. This poor man had been trodden on all the way to Chester by two enormous American soldiers. He was not in a mood to bear patiently anything said in favour of the United States.

After such a train journey a steamer might be expected to be a place of comparative comfort. On the decks at least, if not in the cabins, there would surely be enough room to move without being jostled and crushed. So Mr. Van Rennan and many other wayfarers hoped. They were all disappointed. The sea passage was even more uncomfortable than the railway journey had been. This was not the fault of the steamer itself, which is a well-found and commodious boat. It happened that a strong gale was blowing. It was impossible to remain on deck without being soaked to the skin by flying spray and even waves of solid water which came on board occasionally. The saloons, smoking-room, corridors and stairways were quite as crowded as the corridors and compartments of the train had been. There was an additional discomfort. Almost every one was sea-sick. In the train this had not happened. No one there had even eaten oranges, owing to wartime restrictions, which for once had worked out to the general advantage. A near neighbour eating an orange is very objectionable, but a near neighbour who is sea-sick is more objectionable still. Van Rennan, a hardened traveller, was not himself sick, but he suffered nearly as much as if he had been.

The steamer, owing partly to the gale, partly to the regulations governing the embarkation of passengers, spent two hours more than the usual time making its journey.

Mr. Van Rennan, still in a moderately good temper, did not reach Dublin till eleven p.m.

He drove straight to the Shelbourne Hotel. Sir Aylmer had telegraphed to engage a room for him. But, owing to Colonel Wallaby's careful watch on Sir Aylmer's private correspondence, the telegram was still in the

Censor's Office in London, where several experts in cipher were scratching their heads over it in an effort to discover the code used in what seemed an innocent message. The telegram, as written by Sir Aylmer, ran :

'Kindly reserve room to-night for Mr. Van Rennan arriving from London by Irish mail.'

The very simplicity of the words and its evident attempt to camouflage itself as an ordinary message excited suspicion. The name Van Rennan turned the suspicion into a certainty of some hidden meaning.

The telegram, even if it had arrived, would not have secured a room. The Shelbourne Hotel was full to overflowing, had been full for weeks past and would, as far as could be anticipated, be full for weeks to come. Van Rennan, who had fortunately not dismissed his cab, drove on to the Gresham, only to meet with a similar refusal of any accommodation. The cab-driver suggested six other hotels, and Mr. Van Rennan was sent away from all of them. Dublin, it seemed, was as crowded as London, as crowded as every other city or town in the world, whether belligerent, semi-belligerent or neutral. Nor is it only urban places which are congested in this way. Villages and remote country districts are in the same state. Nowhere is it possible for a traveller to find a bed to sleep in. And this always happens when war is being waged on a large scale. The only possible explanation of this curious fact is that there are far more people in the world during wartime than there are when plenipotentiaries have signed one of the swiftly evanescent treaties of peace. Why populations should increase in this way during wars is a thing which ought to be studied by sociologists.

'It seems to me,' said Van Rennan to his cabman, 'that there isn't a vacant bed in the whole of this city of yours.'

'I wouldn't wonder,' said the cabman, 'but your honour might be right there. It's what I would have

said at the first go off if it wasn't that I didn't want to be disappointing you.'

The disappointment had only been postponed, but it was kind of the cabman to do even that. Every hour gained before sorrow smites us is something to be thankful for.

'In that case,' said Van Rennan, 'you'd better drive me to the station. I'm going down to the west to-morrow. I'll take the earliest train there is, and I'll just have to spend the rest of the night on the platform, or in the waiting-room—if there is one.'

'There might be a waiting-room or there might not. There should be surely, but with the times that does be in it it's hard to say.'

Van Rennan, still undefeated, assured the man that he was not afraid of spending the rest of the night, already more than half gone, on a railway platform.

'I wouldn't doubt it of you,' said the cabman, 'a fine, upstanding gentleman like yourself would be the equal of that and more. Only you won't be going down west to-morrow nor yet the day after, on an early train nor any other.'

'Why not?'

'Because it's only once in three days that a train runs to the west and there was one went to-day. I know that on account of driving a gentleman up to catch it, he being wishful of going to Galway, if so be he could.'

'Do you mean to tell me that I can't get a train till the day after to-morrow?'

'It's on account of the English oppressing this country,' said the cabman, 'not giving us coal enough for the boys to be stoking the engine with.'

Even by this fresh blow Van Rennan's spirit was unbroken, but he realized that three nights, or two and a half at best, on a railway platform could be most unpleasant.

'The only thing for me to do,' he said, 'is to hire your cab for the night and sleep in it. You run me in to some

sort of garage where I won't be disturbed and then you can go home to your own bed, if you have one.'

'Your honour will be welcome to the cab, and I wouldn't charge you a penny for it so long as I wouldn't be driving you anywhere. Only the way of it is this: There's a sister of my own that came up from Mullingar e'er yesterday and she has no place to sleep, any more than you have yourself, and I promised the creature the use of the cab. She's a peaceable kind of a woman and wouldn't be disturbing you, only—I wouldn't like to be deceiving a gentleman like yourself and maybe having you casting it up against me afterwards that I didn't tell you the truth'—here he sank his voice to a whisper—'she has two children with her, and you know what childer is like if they're in a place they're not used to. I wouldn't put it past the youngest of them to be crying for the best part of the night.'

No cab is very large. The thought of sharing it for a night with a woman, however peaceable, and two fractious children made this one seem even smaller than it was. Mr. Van Rennan shrank from the prospect. He had stood up manfully to the dawdling, crowded train, the seasick passengers, the inhospitable hotels and the peculiarities of the Irish railway system, but this was too much for him.

'Is there nothing else you can suggest?' he said.

'It's not in England we are now,' said the cabman. 'It's well off they are there, may God forgive them for it, with their tube shelters and their underground beds and the like. It's little of such things we have in Dublin, more's the pity. But there's a woman I know, married on an uncle of my own she was until he died on her. She manages along the best way she can, keeping a kind of a lodging-house for labouring men in a house she has in a lane off Liffey Street. I'd be ashamed to be mentioning a place like it to a high-up gentleman like yourself, that's accustomed to feather-beds and the best of everything—'

'I'm not feeling the least high up at the moment,' said Van Rennan. 'If that aunt of yours has a bed to spare——'

'It could be that she might, though it might seem poor to you.'

'Drive me to it,' said Van Rennan. 'Whatever it's like it will be better than sharing this cab with your sister and two children.'

II

The lane off Liffey Street, seen at twelve o'clock at night, is a dismal place. Nor was Mrs. Burke, the proprietress of the lodging-house, attractive to look at. No elderly woman is when roused from her bed, especially if she happens to be fat, as Mrs. Burke was. She expressed no pleasure when she recognized her nephew, the cab-driver, and made no pretence of welcoming Mr. Van Rennan.

'I've no bed for you,' was her uncompromising reply to his request for accommodation.

'Ah now,' said the cab-driver, 'don't be talking that way to a gentleman who's a friend of my own.'

The friendship was of mushroom growth. It surprised Van Rennan that it existed at all. But he was in no position to disclaim it. Mrs. Burke looked him over and slightly modified her original statement.

'I've no bed for the likes of him,' she said.

Mr. Van Rennan, still convinced of the power of money, offered a pound for a bed, and when Mrs. Burke still hesitated, raised the bid to two pounds.

'It's no place for the likes of you,' she said. 'It's easy seen you're some kind of a high-up gentleman, and what have I only what's fit for poor labouring men, God help them. It's hot baths you'll be looking for, and towels to be drying yourself with, and sheets on your bed. Nor I wouldn't put it past you to be complaining if them same sheets wasn't clean. How can I be giving you the like of that?'

Mr. Van Rennan would have liked a bath, and after all he had been through deserved one. He would have preferred a bed with sheets on it, but he made no point of that. He assured Mrs. Burke that he would be content with anything that a 'poor labouring man' put up with. Mrs. Burke weakened.

'There's a bed in the back room over the kitchen,' she said, 'and the gentleman can have that if it will content him. There's two beds there, though I wouldn't say the room is overly large. But sure I can't be making it bigger than what God meant it to be, and the man in the other bed is a quiet creature and no more drunk than you are yourself, so he'll not be disturbing you with bawling and singing in the night.'

Mr. Van Rennan gathered that most of Mrs. Burke's clients were more or less drunk when they went to bed, and felt glad that his room-fellow was an exceptional man. He accepted the offer of the second bed in the room 'not overly large'. Mrs. Burke went on with her description of her lodger.

'A distressful poor creature he is,' she said, 'and maybe there's good reason. It's over to England he's going to try can he get enough to keep the wife and children he's leaving behind him. He told me that much when I bid him take an air at the fire in the kitchen before he was off to bed. And that's all he did tell me, though it's my opinion there's more behind it. There he sat, putting his hands out to the fire and not another word out of him, only that he did be saying bits of poetry over to himself. Which is how I knew there was great distress on him. Would a man do the like of that if there wasn't some sorrow in his heart, be the same more or less? You'd pity the creature. Anybody would.'

While she gave this description of her melancholy visitor, Mrs. Burke led Van Rennan up a rickety flight of stairs and along a narrow passage. At the door of what was evidently to be his bedroom she paused and held up a warning finger.

'Will you whist now,' she said, 'and be as quiet as you can. I wouldn't wonder but the poor fellow might be asleep and it would be a pity to be waking him. It's that way with them that's heavy with sorrow, so long as they're asleep they'll not be minding so much. It was that way it was with me when my husband died on me. So long as I was sleeping I might be dreaming of heaven and the blessed saints. It was the other way with me when anybody would wake me.'

She pushed the door open cautiously. Van Rennan, peeping over her shoulder, saw that the man inside was sitting on the end of his bed rocking himself to and fro. His lips were moving though no sound came from them, silently repeating poetry as he had in the kitchen before going to bed.

'Is it awake you are, my poor man?' said Mrs. Burke. 'Here's a gentleman that has come to sleep in the bed forninst the one you're in, a grand gentleman that will be a comfort to you. Are you listening to me now, Mr. Phelim? What's the matter with you that you wouldn't stand up and say God Save Us to the gentleman?'

It was not till Mrs. Burke had left the room that Van Rennan was struck by the name of the man to whom he had been introduced. To him it was a strange name, but for all he knew to the contrary Phelims might be as common in Ireland as Murphys are.

'Mr. Phelim?' he said doubtfully.

'That's what they call me,' said the man. 'Thad-daeus Phelim.'

'Is it a common name in Ireland?'

'There's some that does be called by it, and more that isn't. But there's none of the name where I came from, only myself.'

'I've come over to Ireland to look for a man of your name,' said Van Rennan. 'Would you mind telling me what part of the country you come from? I'm not asking out of curiosity. I really want to know.'

'I'm from Innishbofin, God help me,' said Phelim.

'It's a poor place surely, as poor as any place within the four seas of Ireland. But I'd rather be there than sitting in the Bank of England with all the gold that's in it flowing round my feet.'

'If you're Thaddaeus Phelim from Innishbofin you're the man I'm looking for, and I'm glad to find that you've not been murdered. Maureen—that's your daughter, isn't it?—seemed to think it likely you would be.'

'It might be better if I was murdered,' said Phelim. 'Many's the time since this trouble came on me that I've said that. Wouldn't it be better that way than to be going in and out where nobody would speak to me, nor buy nor sell with me, until I was drove away to a foreign land, and what's worse than that, living with the shame on me that I'd betrayed the cause of Holy Ireland for the sake of gold. Wouldn't it be better to be dead than that?'

'I don't understand Irish politics,' said Van Rennan. 'I never met anybody who did; but I want to clear up this mess if I can. We've got the rest of the night before us. You're not likely to sleep if you are afraid of being murdered at any minute, and I'm not likely to have a quiet time in that bed. I was brought up to dislike bugs. So suppose you tell me the whole story from start to finish.'

Phelim was not naturally a talkative man and as a member of a secret society he had learned to bridle his tongue. But he had for some time been condemned to silence. No one would speak to him and it was impossible for him to speak to men who turned their backs on him and walked away. Even in his own home he had not much intercourse with his family. Maureen would say little except 'I will not', and Bridget went on saying that the money in the bank belonged to Maureen and should not be handed over to McCarthy or any one else. In the end Phelim gave up arguing about it. Indeed he began to believe, or half believe, what his wife said. Such, as all advertisers know, is the effect of constant

reiteration on the human mind. Debarred from all intercourse outside, Phelim relapsed into silence at home. He sat hour after hour in his chimney corner, finding little consolation even in Mitchell's 'Jail Journal', until at last he made up his mind to leave Innishbofin behind him and start a new life on some farm or in some factory in England.

To a man in such a mood Van Rennan's invitation to tell his whole story was irresistible. He longed to talk, and it was a great thing for him to have found a friendly and apparently sympathetic listener.

'The start off of it,' he said, 'was the bottle with the letter in it that Maureen found on the shore. It was out of a German submarine it came.'

'It didn't,' said Van Rennan.

'It's what Michael McCarthy said, and at the first go off I believed him, though I'm not so sure of it now.'

'If Michael McCarthy said that, he's either a liar or a fool, probably both. I know all about that bottle and the letter, and no German had anything to do with it. But never mind about that. Go on with your story. What happened next?'

Phelim went on. Van Rennan interrupted him with an occasional comment.

'Sensible girl,' he said when he heard of Maureen's expedition to the bank and the lodging of the money there.

'She'll make a good wife for some one when the time comes.' This, when Phelim told of Maureen's firm refusal to take the money out again.

'It's what Bridget does be saying,' said Phelim. 'With that much money she'll have her choice of the boys that does be in it when we come to be looking for a husband for her.'

Van Rennan, though interested, brushed aside his desire to enquire into the marriage customs of the people of Innishbofin. Phelim went on with his story, closing on a note of plain despair when he reached the decision

of McCarthy and his associates when they sat in judgement.

'So it comes to this,' said Van Rennan. 'Unless you give fifty pounds or whatever it is to McCarthy and these gangsters of his, life is going to be just plain hell for you and you'll be driven out of the country for the rest of your life.'

Phelim nodded sadly. That was exactly his position.

'And you're not the only one to be considered. Things won't be too pleasant for Maureen, and she's a girl I have a great respect for.'

'It's terrible hard on her,' said Phelim, 'and it will end in her and Bridget coming to England too. She daren't show her nose inside the school this month on account of the way Michael McCarthy does be looking at her, him being the master the same as I told you; and the names the other girls puts on her. It would surprise you the things they say.'

'Nothing about Innishbofin would surprise me in the least. But as I was saying, there are others to be thought of beside you and Maureen. There's Sir Aylmer Elton. You've never heard of him, but he's an Irishman like yourself, and he's being persecuted by bankers and secret service men and censorship people, headed by a doddering hoptoad called Wallaby, a fellow who'd lead the queen of clubs when any one with a grain of sense would have seen that a small heart was the proper card. I'm saying nothing about myself, though it's pretty tough on a man of my age to travel the way I did yesterday and then spend half the night driving round Dublin in a rickety cab and not able to go to bed in the end for fear of being eaten alive. That's the situation as I understand it, and for all our sakes it's got to be cleared up.'

'It would be well if it was,' said Phelim, 'but there's no way of doing that. Michael McCarthy is a terrible determined man.'

'Michael McCarthy is a malignant ass; but we can't put all the blame on him. The trouble really arose

through one little girl, a very nice little girl, wanting to give a birthday present to another little girl, one of the most sensible little girls I've ever heard of. That's the way most of the real troubles in the world start—through good intentions. But we needn't go into that. The question is what we can do now?'

'There's nothing we can do,' said Phelim. 'There's no way of mending the thing that's broke.'

'That may be true about teapots, but in this case there is something to be done. You can go back to Innishbofin and pay the money over to McCarthy.'

'I can not, for Maureen wouldn't take it out of the bank to give it to me, and I don't know that I'd ask that of her any more. It might be that her Ma's right and the money belongs to her.'

'It does,' said Van Rennan. 'And it's in that bank it will stay. But I suppose McCarthy and the rest of them would be content if you gave them that much money, whether it was from Maureen you took it or not.'

'They would, of course. But where would I get fifty pounds?'

'That's where I come in,' said Van Rennan. 'I'll pay up the money to get us all out of the mess we're in and count it cheap at the price. I suppose McCarthy would take off the curse he's put on you, and Maureen will be allowed to go back to school, and Sir Aylmer can go on collecting files and making minutes, and I shan't have to travel to this damned country again or spend a night in a place like this. I'd pay twice the money willingly for that. If McCarthy asks questions about how you got the money you'll have to tell a few lies. You've no objection to doing that, I suppose.'

'I have not, none in the world.'

'You could say, for instance, that you beat Maureen with a stick till she took the money out of the bank and gave it to you.'

'I could say that.'

'And McCarthy would believe you?'

'He might.'

'Well, that settles the whole business. Here's the money.'

He drew a wallet from his pocket and counted out the notes.

'It's a great gift you're giving to the cause of Ireland,' said Phelim.

'It's nothing of the sort,' said Van Rennan. 'The last thing in the world I'd give money to is what you call the cause of Ireland. I'd see you and your German friends in hell and leave them there before I gave them a penny. What I'm doing is buying peace and quiet for every one concerned.'

'You may say that,' said Phelim, 'and what's more you may believe it, but it's on the cause of the liberty of Ireland that the money will be spent, on that and on getting the better of the Orangemen up in Belfast.'

PART IX

LONDON

I

IN SPITE of his fear of unpleasant insects, Van Rennan got a few hours sleep after he had finished his talk with Thaddaeus Phelim. He was very tired after his journey and his wanderings round the Dublin streets. He made no attempt to undress, but lay down in his clothes. Rather unexpectedly he fell asleep at once, lulled perhaps by Phelim's crooning recitation of Anna Parnell's poem which he had managed to set to an ancient tune, originally a lullaby. Van Rennan was vaguely conscious of hearing what appeared to be the final lines

'Then contented I shall go back to the shamrocks
When mine eyes have seen thy glory.'

Then he went to sleep, unaware that Phelim had begun the whole thing over again, still to the same tune.

He woke at an early hour, when daylight had just begun to penetrate the single dirty window of the room. He found that for washing and shaving he was expected to share with Phelim a cracked basin and a single small jug of cold water. Phelim, cheered by the prospect of being able to pay what he did not owe to Michael McCarthy, was quite willing to surrender his claim to the basin and his share of the water. Van Rennan refused to accept the sacrifice. He thought that he could do better for himself by going out unwashed and finding a Turkish Bath. Here he met with a fresh disappointment. Dublin is indeed singularly rich in Turkish Baths. Hardly even London itself can boast of more or better equipped establishments of the kind. But, unfortunately, none of them was available. Owing to the desperate shortage of fuel none of the baths could be

heated, and Van Rennan's wanderings were vain, indeed worse than the wanderings of the night before, for this time he had no friendly cab to take him from place to place.

Before setting out he thought he would make sure that everything in Innishbofin was comfortably settled.

'Are you sure,' he said to Phelim, 'that you can manage all right when you get home?'

'I can. Thanks be to God and your honour there'll be no trouble pacifying Michael McCarthy. If he gets the money what more will he be wanting?'

'Then I needn't go down to Innishbofin?'

'You need not, unless you're wishful to be doing that same.'

Van Rennan had no such wish. His experience of travel to and in Ireland left him with no desire for more.

'But if so be,' said Phelim, 'that it would be a pleasure to you to go there you'll be as welcome as the new potatoes after the winter. There's not much we have to offer you, but what we have will be yours for the asking—the like of a lobster, now. There's some has a great liking for lobsters and there's plenty of them, though there mightn't be much else.'

Van Rennan was among those who had a liking for lobsters, but it did not seem worth while to go to Innishbofin to gratify this taste. He was touched by Phelim's offer of hospitality. No man can offer even a highly-honoured guest more than he has. But Van Rennan had an excuse for refusal ready at hand.

'It's good of you to invite me,' he said, 'and I'm very fond of lobsters. But I think I'd better put off my visit till—well, till after the war. The fact is that I have some important business in London and I'm in rather a hurry to get back there. So unless I'm really wanted on Innishbofin—'

'If there's any kind of a hurry on you,' said Phelim, 'you'd better not be coming to Innishbofin. The way things is in this country at the present time it might take

longer than you'd like to get there. It's only once in three days that there does be a train from Dublin running out to the west and it was yesterday that the last one started. So you'd have two days to wait for the next one and that mightn't suit you.'

Two days spent wandering about Dublin and two nights in Mrs. Burke's lodging-house would certainly not suit Van Rennan. There was hardly anything in the world he would have disliked more.

'Then,' said Van Rennan, 'I'll get back to London as soon as I can.'

After that he went out on his futile search for a Turkish Bath. He did in the end find a barber who was willing to shave him, and this restored his self-respect. There is nothing which degrades a man more in his own estimation than a twenty-four-hour growth of beard, and Mr. Van Rennan was one of those unfortunates who have to shave twice a day if he was to look decent in the evening. He also succeeded in getting food. Of this, at least, there is no lack in Ireland. New York is not better off than Dublin for chickens, hams, butter, cream and everything edible or drinkable except tea.

The journey back to London was not so unpleasant as the journey to Dublin the day before. The sea was calmer and it was possible to keep away from the people who were hopelessly sea-sick. But the train was just as full of soldiers going south as it had been of soldiers going north. These were chiefly Americans, and seemed to Van Rennan the very same Americans who had trampled on his feet the day before. In this he was very likely right. They probably were the same men. Any one who knows anything about military affairs—and Van Rennan knew a good deal—knows that travelling in trains is considered an essential part of the training of American soldiers. They are sent north, south, east and west as rapidly and as continuously as possible. This is not done with the object of settling them in any particular place, for as soon as they arrive anywhere they are immediately

sent off again, either to the place from which they started, or, if possible, to somewhere still more distant. The idea is that these men should be inured to hardship before they are sent campaigning against the Germans. It is well known that any one who travels much in English trains will find any ordinary battlefield a quiet and comfortable place. It is also regarded as desirable to impress the English people with the size and vigour of the American Army. This can be done by keeping the men travelling continuously up and down the country, much as stage armies pass to and fro before the footlights to create the illusion that there are many thousands of them. The largest and heaviest American soldiers are kept in England with the same object of giving an impression of immense physical strength. Since they are likely to have the largest feet, the civilian traveller is more heavily trampled upon than he would be by smaller men. The actual soldier is in no way to blame for all this. He dislikes this part of his training very much. His manners are good, surprisingly so considering all he has gone through, and he always apologizes to his victim, and is ready, even eager, to help a fellow-traveller with his luggage, especially if the fellow-traveller is a pretty girl with an engaging eye.

English soldiers are, of course, also hardened in this way and spend as much of their time in trains as the Americans do. For the military mind works the same way in all countries. But there are not nearly so many of them, so they do not produce such an impression on the civilians who find themselves obliged to make a journey.

Thus it happened that the latter part of Van Rennan's journey south was quite as uncomfortable as his journey north the day before.

The train was two and a half hours late when it reached Euston. This is not an uncommon happening. Many people blame the railway companies for this excessive unpunctuality. This is probably unjust. Others, those who pride themselves on possessing inside information,

say that the War Office and the American military authorities, acting together for once, have given orders to the railway companies that all trains should be late, thereby adding something of value to the training of the travelling soldiers. It is no doubt true that patience is a useful lesson for a soldier to learn, and it is well to be accustomed to disappointment, like that of finding that you have only got to Rugby when you think the train is slowing down into Euston. A soldier who can bear that will not be distressed when he finds that he has to shorten his line just when he thinks that by hard fighting he has forced the enemy to shorten his.

Van Rennan, it is feared, did not benefit, as no doubt the soldiers did, from the extra time spent in extreme discomfort. His temper, though not easily roused, blazed fiercely when, as in the case of Colonel Wallaby's lead of the queen of clubs, the provocation is unbearable. He reached his hotel jaded, dirty and very angry.

Next morning he went to visit Sir Aylmer. His first impulse, for his temper still smouldered hotly, was to go early, very early, so as to catch Sir Aylmer in bed. But he gave up this plan because he wanted his breakfast badly and saw no chance of getting it—owing to 'depletion of staff', according to the manager—before nine o'clock. Even so, he reached the office of the Ministry of Co-Ordination half an hour before Sir Aylmer arrived. This did not render him any more cheerful, and things were not improved when Sir Aylmer's secretary brought him a copy of the *Times*. All men, in her opinion, at least all men in a position to visit Sir Aylmer in his private office, delighted in the *Times*. Unfortunately, Van Rennan did not. Accustomed to the American press, he complained of a certain stodginess and looked in vain for a snappy paragraph.

Sir Aylmer, well fed, well washed and clothed, satisfied with a morning cigar and a glance at the correspondence column of the *Times*, arrived at half-past ten. He greeted Van Rennan in the friendliest way.

'Back again?' he said. 'You certainly weren't long!'

'A damned sight too long for my taste. I don't expect you'd have stayed any longer if you'd been there, even though you are an Irishman.'

'I hope nothing went wrong,' said Sir Aylmer, a little nervously. If Van Rennan's mission had failed he might find himself involved again in his own difficulties.

'Everything went wrong. In the first place, I was nearly crushed and trampled to death in the train. Then I couldn't get a bed in Dublin, except one crowded out with bugs; and finally I subscribed fifty pounds towards building new submarines for the Germans.'

'You did what?' said Sir Aylmer, greatly startled.

'It may have been for buying more torpedoes. I'm not sure. It was something to help the Germans, anyhow, and I hated doing it.'

'But this,' said Sir Aylmer, 'is frightful, perfectly frightful! It's what's called comforting the King's enemies, and it's one of the worst crimes there is.'

'It can't be as bad as all that,' said Van Rennan. 'Fifty pounds is all I gave, and I don't fancy that will go far towards building a submarine. I doubt if you'd get the smallest gun for three times the money.'

'It's not so much the harm that's actually done,' said Sir Aylmer. 'It's the principle of the thing! And it's sure to be found out. The Naval Intelligence people have a pretty smart man in those parts, as I have good reasons to know.'

'Well, if the worst comes to the worst and I'm tried for treason, it simply means that I'll have to pay up again. Thank God I can afford it.'

'I don't think you'll get off with a fine.'

'Oh, it won't come to that. I know your judges and people of that sort are incorruptible. Still, there must be a figure that the most incorruptible man will take, and I'm in a position to offer it. Besides, they can't do anything to me, I'm an American citizen, and as we're all

of us saying all day, international complications must be avoided at any cost. I don't think you need worry about what will happen to me. The thing I want to make clear is that I'm not going through all this again, not even to help you or to gratify Elsie, and I'm sure very fond of Elsie. You can't realize what I've been through. Nobody could unless he'd been through it himself. That train! And I detest people vomiting over my boots. I assure you they did on the steamer. And that frousty cab—hours in it. I mentioned the bugs before. But I'm not sure that they were the worst. How would you like to spend a night listening to a crazy Irishman reciting poetry? No. I won't go through all that again.'

'Surely you won't have to,' said Sir Aylmer. 'The whole thing is settled now, or almost settled. There is your trial at the Old Bailey still hanging over us. But you don't seem to mind that.'

'I don't,' said Van Rennan. 'But it will all happen again, or something worse, if Elsie is allowed to go on throwing bottles into the sea. Heaven knows where the next one might drift ashore. The Antarctic perhaps, and I will not, simply will not, spend months on an iceberg pacifying penguins. Elsie must be strictly forbidden to throw bottles even into a pond. I expect you to use your authority as a parent to make it clear to her that this sort of thing must stop. I know the child meant no harm. But good intentions are just the most dangerous things there are. Pave the way to—well, the sort of thing I've been through, and Hell's too mild a word for that.'

Sir Aylmer felt that he must put in a word of defence of his daughter.

'After all,' he said, 'the trouble was more your fault than hers. It was you who sent the money. If you hadn't, or if you had sent a reasonable sum, say ten shillings or so, all these complications would never have come on us.'

'Worse would have happened if I hadn't sent the money. You don't know what I was up against. My wife, who's very fond of Elsie, was planning a regular relief scheme for the west of Ireland and had dozens of enthusiastic women to help her. Talk about strained relations between Allies! We might have been fighting each other if I hadn't put a stop to that and the only thing to do was to send the money.'

'Why not tackle Elsie yourself,' said Sir Aylmer, 'if she has to be tackled?'

'You're her father. It's plainly your job.'

'She's in your house. You're *in loco parentis* for the time being.'

'There'd be the hell of a row if I did anything.'

'Surely you're not afraid of a little girl like Elsie?' said Sir Aylmer.

'I'm very much afraid of my wife,' said Van Rennan. 'If she got it into her head that I was bullying Elsie there might be—there would be—a row which might end in a divorce, and I don't want that. No. You're the man to do it, Elton, and it must be done. We cannot have any more sea-going bottles.'

Sir Aylmer, overborne by Van Rennan's vehemence, undertook, not indeed to give orders, but to make an appeal to his daughter.

II

MY DARLING ELSIE,

I do not think that I have ever been a severe or even a masterful father. I have never, or hardly ever, said either 'do' or 'don't' to you even when you were quite small. When you are a little older you will understand why. When I was young it was believed that parents, school-teachers and such people knew better than children what is right and good. I am still of this opinion, but I see that I may be mistaken. The wisest and best people now know that children ought not to be ordered

to do this and that, but should be left to do exactly as they like, the great thing being the development of self-expression. I have always acted towards you on this principle, being convinced that my own ideas are likely to be wrong and those of all enlightened men and women almost certainly right. All this you will understand when you are older, and will, I am sure, be grateful to me.

But now I feel that I must—not give you an order, saying don't—but entreat you to follow my advice. I hope you will never again write a letter, put it into a bottle and throw it into the sea. You are too young to understand how such simple pleasures, self-expression in you, often create trouble for other people. You must believe me that this is so. You did not mean any harm when you sent off your letter from the middle of the ocean. But the consequence was terrible. A poor Irish farmer was very nearly being murdered. Many people who disagree with his politics might say that it would be a good thing if he were dead. But he did not think so. Nor, I am sure, do you. His little daughter, Maureen, was prevented from going to school. I daresay she thought this a good thing and perhaps you agree with her. I do, too, though I cannot say so publicly. In my opinion, and very likely in yours and hers, there is too much school in the world. But most people think there is not nearly enough, and they would say that it is a bad thing and not at all good to put an end to Maureen's education. I know that you love your father, for you have often told me so. You would not like any harm to come to me. But because of that letter of yours which you put into a bottle I was persecuted in a truly dreadful way and was almost put into prison. There are people, good and wise men, who think it would be better for the world if I and all other members of the Civil Service were put into prison and kept there. They may be right. But I should not like it and I am sure you would not, even if the world were a happier place afterwards. You

owe a great deal to Mr. Van Rennan, who has been very kind to you. But because of your letter he had to endure great suffering. He was trodden on by large soldiers in a train. He had to watch people being sea-sick quite near him in a steamer. He was obliged to drive round and round Dublin nearly all night in a smelly cab, and then sit for hours on the corner of a hard bed. Mr. Van Rennan is a rich man, and some of the very best people in the world, such as bishops and archbishops, think that the rich ought to be made to suffer for the good of their souls and to please the poor. Perhaps you think so too, but you are, believe me, too young to take on the office of judge and executioner. Yet this is what you did when you wrote your letter and put it in a bottle.

So, my dearest Elsie, I beg of you never to do such a thing again.

Ever your affectionate father,

AYLMER ELTON

